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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

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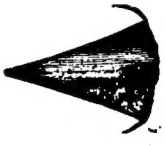

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SHORT STORIES.

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 405.] For the Week ending October 3rd, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

The Last King of Atlantis

OR,

The Romance of a Lost Continent.

By Geo. C. Wallis, Author of "*The Winning of Gunhild*," etc.

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION.

LONDON, *May 27th*, 1963.

THERE has been much speculation of late—amongst that large class of people who have little better to do—as to the relative merits of the twin discoveries of aerial and submarine navigation which have so revolutionised the conditions of life within the last half-century.

The enthusiasts of mechanical flight point with pride to the speed and directness of modern travel, to the defiance we can bid to the severity of winter journeys, to the stamping out of war with all its horrors, to the ease with which the hitherto inaccessible regions of the Poles and the interiors of continents are now mapped out and known, and to the greater accuracy of astronomical observations taken from stations suspended above the clouds, where the observer can always depend upon a clear sky.

To this the advocates of the claims of submarine navigation reply by referring, with equal pride, to the splendid security of voyaging under water, where the ship is ever in a calm; to the vast stores of sunken treasure recovered by the various governments; to the great increase in our geological and biological knowledge which a thorough examination of the sea-bed has given; to the quantities of chalk, coral, lime, pearl, and sponge, which are now easily taken from the depths; to the great facility for deep-sea fishing now afforded; and last, but not least, to the historical relics that have been dug up from submarine excavations, bearing witness to the existence of nations which flourished when the proportions of land and water were different to the present.

This latter claim of the "submarines," I think, turns the scale in their favour. From this the reader may surmise that I am one of those who have little else to do than discuss these profitless questions. In justice to myself, however, I must say that I am a submarine by experience as well as by conviction, and that I have brought up from the sea-depths the material on which my conviction is founded.

Amongst other things we submarines have traced out the shores and mountain ranges of Lemuria, that vast continent now buried under the Indian Ocean; we have discovered and marked out the thickness and limit of every reef and every shifting sand on all the coasts of the world; and, above all, have discovered and systematically explored the greater part of the submerged land once named Atlantis.

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For centuries its very existence has been looked at as an idle dream by the majority of thinkers, but now we know its sunken shores, its buried cities, its river-beds, and mountain chains; some of its history, many of its customs, a little of its religion. Since the *Sealion* first sank down on the ooze-covered ruins of one of its towns, and brought to light some of the iron implements of its long-forgotten people, a great advance has been made in our knowledge of the world's past history.

We now know that Atlantis was a continent whose shores once stretched from the western bounds of Europe to the eastern coast of America, and afterwards, gradually at first and at last suddenly, subsided till it reached its present level, and the ocean shut off the new world from the knowledge of the old. We know that it was a kingdom and that its people were a warlike race, in language and beliefs akin to the ancient Egyptians, a maritime and colonising nation, once having great dependencies in Africa and America. We know that it supported a large priesthood and boasted many splendid temples, and that its religion consisted mainly in the worship of a trinity—three spirits in one—with a number of lesser gods, and the belief in a future state called the shadowland, wherein was supposed to be an everlasting garden of delight.

All this we knew before my great discovery of last year, and the classical legend of Plato, so long considered false, is now acknowledged on all sides to be either a remarkable coincidence, or due to the rumours of Atlantis which must have reached Europe from the Atlantian colony in Nubia. The later hypothesis seems to me the correct one when we recollect the tradition of the ancient Ethiopians—that they came originally from a country in the west, beyond the sea. Professors Herr and Unger, who in 1861 suggested that Atlantis united Europe and America in the Miocene period, giving biological reasons for their belief, and the writer of the article in the NATURAL HISTORY REVIEW* on "The Atlantis Hypothesis in its Botanical Aspect," are now avenged on their critics. But all this is to the story I have to tell as the dancing of the dry bones of scientific research is to the nervous, forceful action of a living novel.

On the 8th of February, 1962, I set out in the *Octopus*—an ugly name, by-the-way, for a splendid ship—from the Government Docks in the Thames, to assist in the work of exploration on the Atlantic bed, taking with me three scientific men and a crew of capable sailors. Travelling on the surface of the sea at the uniform rate of one hundred miles an hour, we reached our destination in a little over a day and a half, and prepared to sink to the ocean floor. Some of my colleagues were new to this mode of pursuing knowledge, and M——, in particular, though chosen by the Bureau of Science from forty eager applicants for his post—that of geologist to the ship—openly wished that he had been among the thirty-nine rejected and forlorn!

However, I told him to keep cool, and that I would answer for his safety in the silent depths. The engineer then pulled the actuating lever of the mechanism, the sliding doors closed automatically and hermetically, and with a slight rocking and a muffled roar the great ship sank through the yielding waters. M—— clutched the furniture of the cabin, and looked at the dense darkness outside the thick glass windows with scared eyes, his face turning pale. Then I touched the light signal, and streaming past the window, the glare of our search-lamps lit up the still water. Great monsters of the deep, open mouthed, flashed past as we sank down, lithe-bodied snake-like creatures twirled and twisted as the ray of light swept over them, scintillating sparks shot up from below as invisible denizens of the sea dashed through the line of our vision, and, except for the faint muffled wash of the water on the curved steel sides of our vessel, all was deathly calm. I looked at my manometer after a few seconds had passed.

"We shall soon be resting on the solid earth," I said to M—— "with a pressure equal to some hundreds of atmospheres on our hull. Look out for the blue hills of Atlantis!"

As I spoke I signalled for more light, and looking through the most illumined window we saw the dim, misty peaks of the submarine mountains rising into the glow of our electric rays, and very soon the *Octopus* settled gently down upon a wide, ooze-covered plain, not many yards from where another ship was lying, with a score of dark figures creeping slowly about on the ground near her. It was the old *Sealion*, which I knew to be then engaged in the work by the American Congress, and so we lost no time in donning our diving suits and joining them on the sea-floor. The scene was magnificent, the dense darkness all around contrasting vividly with the brilliant area lit by the search-lights, into and out of which so many strange forms of life were passing and repassing, that the effect was kaleidoscopic.

The men of the *Sealion* were laying a blasting charge, and, deciding to join forces with them, we laid a hand to the work, and soon had the compound of litrolite in a Harrison patent case connected to the time-fuse set for twelve minutes. That done, we scrambled on board our vessels, and, setting the engines to work at their utmost speed, dashed away from the spot. Exactly on the stroke of the thirteenth minute a dull, red orb of fire appeared for an instant in the black water behind, then vanished, immediately followed by a rending thunder-crash that caused the ships to toss and shiver in the shaken sea. Returning, we found that a great portion of the calcareous deposit had been broken up, revealing the long-hidden ground.

We repeated the operation till a large portion of the sea floor was laid bare, and then, renewing our store of air by releasing some of the solidified atmosphere* in our reservoirs, took pick and shovel and set to work.

It proved a rich field for our labours, and on the 13th the *Sealion*, having filled her hold with what was deemed a good collection of valuable antiquities, rose to the surface and set her prow for home. Three days later—that memorable 16th February—we made the crowning discovery of the expedition.

On that day, for the first time, I succeeded in inducing M—— to venture from the ship and accompany me to the ruins of a large city we were then exploring. It appeared to have been a large and populous city in the palmy days of Atlantis, but was so wreck-strewn that it must have suffered some great disaster even before sinking under the waves. About a mile from the outskirts of it, to the north, the weed-hung walls of what must at one time have been a tower of immense size and strength, jutted from the sea-bed. Judging from the dimensions of its base and the slope of its sides, it could not have been less than a hundred feet higher than the Eiffel Tower of Paris, or just fifty feet lower than the Tower of Babel, which Yankee emulation erected in Chicago in 1907.

Walking over the rough ground, hampered by our heavy helmeted suits, was no light toil, and M——, unused to this method of locomotion, stumbled once for every three or four steps he made. Something unusually heavy caught my feet whilst laughing at my friend's antics, and stooping, I found a large, thick roll of beaten copper, green with verdigris in places, but untouched in others, doubtless having been well covered by dirt and fallen masonry before the lime deposit had formed on it. I took it to the ship without attaching any extra importance to it, and soon afterwards, having as much weight in as her hull could lift, floated the *Octopus* to the surface, and put her head about for England.

When I came to examine the roll of copper I found to my surprise that it contained a number of sheets of parchment similar to dry papyrus leaves, well fastened in between the metal folds, and written closely over in the Atlantian

* NOTE—(1862) p. 149.

* Professor Dewar (1893 or thereabouts) was, I believe, the first to successfully accomplish this solidification.

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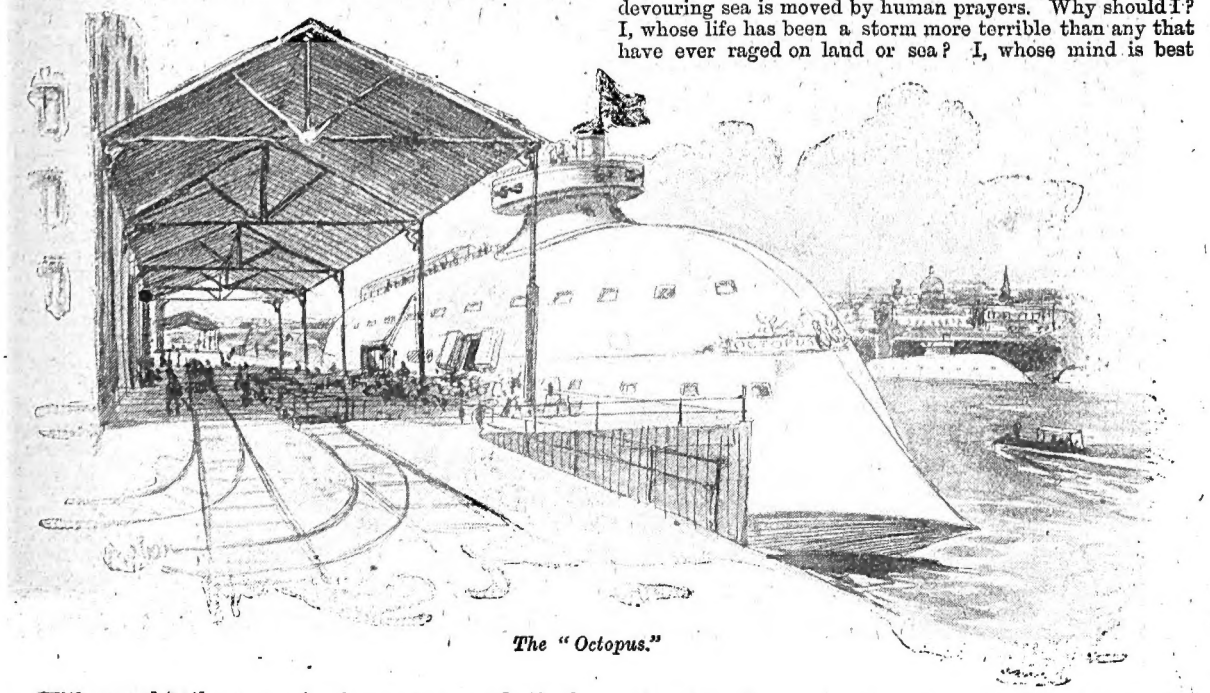
character. My curiosity was roused, and, leaving all our other finds in abeyance, I resolutely set myself the task of translating, by Richard's key,* the whole of that lengthy, ancient MS., which I have named "The Last King of Atlantis."

The news of my discovery has already been bruited abroad, and several experts in archæology having confirmed the accuracy of my translation, I think the time has come to give the story to the world. The chapter divisions and headings, and some of the terms used, are, of course, of my own choosing, but in substance I can affirm that the English version is a true reflex of the famous manuscript, which may now be seen by the curious in the British Museum, Atlantian Section, No. 48.

Of the story I need say little, since the history of the last king of that most unfortunate country, who went through the most desperate adventures in Nubia, Egypt, and Mexico, cannot fail to interest the reader on its own merits.



The "Octopus."

With regard to the supernatural appearances and priestly premonitions of which Arnon tells, particularly the vision of Isis, the thousand years sleep by Marenso, and the last words of Briseis, I venture no opinion. Modern science will probably question their reality—modern scepticism certainly will—but I have thought it better to tell the story as its author put it down, rather than break the continuity or detract from the interest of the oldest autobiography in the world.

F. Ernest Hamlyn, F.R.S.

CHAPTER I.

On the Shore of Life.

Swiftly flows the foamy tide on the sullen shores of the Bay of Kronos; heavily boom the breakers on the distant bar; hoarsely screams the seamew in his wheeling flight; resistlessly tosses the ocean far and wide in its restless majesty; sobs and sighs by turns the rising, threatening gale. 'Tis an even presageful of storm, of mighty conflicts of wind and sea and rain, and I, Arnon, sitting here in my lonely watch-tower, already seem to feel the massive fabric rock and sway before the fierce impetus of the tempest's breath. But though the gale should roar ten thousandfold its worst, and the very heavens be rent asunder or the earth be split in twain, it will not move me nor stay my hand from writing, unless in the sudden shock of elements and worlds my spirit and my body be torn apart with one fell stroke of fate.

Yes, the storm is rising, and the sky, already sparkling with the light of a thousand stars and silvered with the gleam of the crescent moon, will soon be swept from end to end with the rolling banks of curling cloud, passing, re-passing, and over-passing one another, or charging in confusion hither and thither, until the thunder rolls and the lightning darts its deadly shafts at the stolid earth below, riving the giant trees and ploughing furrows in the very rock.

Let it come! I shall heed it less than yonder granite column heeds the fanning of a firefly's wing, or yonder all-devouring sea is moved by human prayers. Why should I? I, whose life has been a storm more terrible than any that have ever raged on land or sea? I, whose mind is best attuned to the crash of empires, the fall of kings, the rallying cry of battle, or the thunders of a people's praise?

Yet, oh! thou who read'st this—it may be in ages after I am gone to the shades—think not that the sound of conflict is the only melody that has moved this heart. You shall hear without straining of ears to listen, above and through all the other notes in the harmony of life, the grand keytone of an undying love. And should you in your incredulity mistrust my words, I hold your unbelief of small account—care for it less than I care for the tempest that is already warring without my solitary chamber overlooking the heaving bay.

Yes, read, and you shall learn how time and circumstances have filled up for me the sixty years that lie between this day and the day on which I first gave vent to a wailing cry. You shall learn how the mightiest power the world has ever known has been humbled to the dust by the very magnitude of her victories and the squandered luxury of her unsurpassed prosperity; how I have been, in turn, pirate, captive, priest, sailor, soldier, courtier, and king; how, through all the wreck of wealth and name, and all the gain of war and cunning, and all the shadows of my transient loves, one great affection has held me in its chains for good and ill for now nigh forty years: and how the surging, restless ocean

* Richard has been aptly termed the Champollion of the 20th century.

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ever creeping forward with insidious steps, treacherous, cat-like, has seized upon our country, pace by pace, until but a curving reef now remains of our beloved Atlantis, the mistress of the seas.

It makes the salt tears start to my eyes e'en now, as I think of it, for out there, beyond the white-crested bar, is

I clung to the lowest step of a stairway.

buried under the waves the quiet glade where first I breathed my love to Briseis. Back! ye bitter memories, and let me write—as the wind rises higher and higher, and the billows dash further and further up the tower—faster, faster!

* * * * *

Faintly limned upon the misty background of the past, the first image that my memory can clearly trace is a vision of the ocean that I love so well. I see myself, a tiny youth, wandering alone upon a strip of sand at the foot of a frowning cliff, so high above my little black, curl-covered head that I thought the top must surely be above the sky. To the right of me the sand and shingle lay in a narrow path at the base of the beetling crags, nor could I see its end; while to the left it ceased, and the rock-bound coast curved out upon the sea, fading away in sullen greyness far as the eye could reach.

Above, far above the giddy height where the sea-birds wheeled and screamed their harshest notes, the sun shone fiery in a heaven of cloudless blue, heating the rocks and pebbles till the skin was blistered by the very touch of them, and it seemed as though I were walking in an open furnace. Shelter I could not find, and out there in front of me, temptingly, tantalisingly, lay the sparkling liquid sea, rising like a dark, cool bank beyond my reach.

As I stood and gazed with all the wonder of childhood, a mast, and then another, and then a sail, and last a ship, appeared on the rim of the sea, moved slowly across and disappeared in reverse fashion at another point. Angrily I shook my tiny fist at the vessel, for not coming to take me off the lonely shore, and when it came not nearer for all my demonstrations, sat down on the hot sand and wept a flood of petulant tears.

Strangely enough, I remember that I seemed to know, instinctively, the nature of that moving speck on the sea, and from that have been led to think that I must have been abandoned on that desolate beach by an unnatural parent; but whether it be so or not, it has never been granted me to know. At the end of my life's journey I am still ignorant of its beginning. Since the day I woke to find myself an outcast, alone with the careless elements, I have never lost my hold on the thread of memory. Before then I can only recall a few faint flashes of intelligence, darting meteor like across a sky of densest gloom.

A glimpse of the sea in calm and storm, the recollection of a ship with its banks of oars, a few fierce dark faces, and one face unlike the others, calm and lovely, with a look of motherly tenderness; that is all the first half-dozen years have left me, and that little even grows fainter with the gathering age of time.

After I had cried until I was tired, the more especially as there was no one whom the sound could annoy, I ceased my pettish bewailings and set about to pry into my surroundings, as is the wont of children left to themselves.

The tide was ebbing when I first gazed at it, but now as I have turned my steps to the right and trotted along close to the towering cliffs, it turned, and each roller breaking on the shore sent its spray further up the sand. Presently the part on which I walked, as far from the sea as I could get, began to swell and then to sink beneath me, and presently the waves washed my little bare feet at each step. Soon I was wading in the bubbling surf and drenched to the skin by the salt spray that curled up, dashed itself in mighty impotence against the unresponsive rock, and then fell down upon me in a soaking shower.

It was not so very long before I was lifted off my feet, and then and there learnt the useful art of swimming. I am inclined to think that I had been in the water before then, so well did I progress in the rude lesson, but whether it was so or not, I managed to keep myself above water for a considerable time, assisting myself, whenever possible, by the ledges and angles in the cliff-face. At last, tired and bruised by the buffetings of the rough and thoughtless waves and the heavy knocks I received when swung sharply up to the hot, steaming rock, I began to feel my little strength give way. I called for help, screamed, wept, and called again, but all to no purpose. Beyond me lay the sea, without a speck to mar its glittering surface. Above, the sun shone pitilessly in the same unclouded sky.

Now I was nigh to the end, and in a very short time my struggles would have ceased, so that this history would never have been written, when, with a last despairing effort, I seized a projection in the rock that rose so menacingly above me, and clung to it with all the tenacity of a limpet. And I found when I had hung there till my breath came back, that above it was another like projection, and then another; and I saw that I clung to the lowest step of a stairway cut out of the solid stone, leading up I knew not whither.

This put fresh nerve into my little mind, already aged in experience in the last hour, and with eager joy I began to slowly climb the narrow steps. About a third of the height from the summit the cliff frowned outwards, so that

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no one on the top could see the rough stairs, and at that point they ceased, the last step being the threshold of a dark, wide-mouthed cavern, in whose depths, as I peered, shone sundry curious gleams of light. A few more tottering strides and I was within, groping round for something on which to lay my weary body.

I slept long and soundly, waking with the rays of a newly risen sun shining full into the mouth of the cave. Then I saw that the place which I had so opportunely found was a very roomy cavern stretching back into the heart of the cliff for many fathoms, and lined on each side with long, rude, wooden shelves, on which stood rows of clumsy-looking earthen jars, and underneath which were several huge boxes, fastened down by ropes as thick as my own arm.

But what attracted my attention most were several heaps of shining stones that lay upon the floor, which sparkled in the sunlight like a myriad points of fire; and several long, square bars of a dull, yellow metal, which seemed to have a curious glow in the glare of day. For awhile I played with those strange toys, the shining stones, then, impelled by the pangs of hunger, began to search the cavern for something wherewith to appease my appetite. I was not long in discovering it. One of the earthern jars was full to the brim with deliciously cool water—none of the purest, I imagine, but quite good enough for my undiscriminating years. In another jar I found a plentiful supply of nuts, which wonderfully satisfied my cravings.

Then I went and played again with the pretty stones, and before long, feeling still sleepy, I lay down and passed into the land of dreams with all the carelessness of youth, one arm, upon which my head was pillowed, clutching one of the bars of yellow gold, the other hand still grasping the largest of the brilliant diamonds in its chubby fingers.

Thus I lay when they found me, and I was roused by the sound of voices.

It was still light, though the day was drawing to its close and one star shone bright and clear through the open mouth of the cave. By the faint light that found its way in, assisted by the flickering glare of half a score of torches stuck in sockets on the wall, I could distinguish some fifty men grouped around me in various attitudes, some amused, some angry, and all astonished.

One, who appeared to be the chief, dressed in a short tunic of dark cloth, pulled in round the waist by a belt from which hung axe and dagger, and wearing a pair of huge, high leathern boots with square-cut toes, was the first to address me, and it seemed as though I had heard the language he spoke from my birth upward.

"How came you here, youngster?" he asked roughly, giving me a slight kick with one of his dreadful boots to emphasise the question.

"Up the steps, when the water was too high for me to stay below," I answered, getting on my feet, and likewise on my dignity, which even then was not small.

"Ah!" cried he who questioned me, "and pray, what were you doing in the water below? And mind, young one, you answer me civilly, or I treat you to another kick."

I told him, not flinching in the least, but looking him boldly in the face, all that I could remember of myself, scanty as it was; but he only seemed puzzled the more.

"What were those men like whom you last remember?" he asked at length.

"Big and fierce and ugly, like all these," I said, waving my arm round comprehensively, "and one was thin and evil-looking, like that man," I added, pointing to a cadaverous individual who stood a little aside, regarding me fixedly with his piercing eyes. There was a general laugh at this sally, but the thin man, heeding it not, bent forward and solemnly caught me a stinging buffet on the cheek.

"Hold! Zerah!" cried the Chief, "the young one is but small and thou art strong. 'Twas a coward's blow. And he spoke truth, I swear!"

An angry scowl was all the reply Zerah made to this, but before he had finished the grimace I had recovered from the effects of the knock-down blow, and, with eyes blazing and teeth clenched, had snatched up and hurled at him one of the largest diamonds near my hand. The jagged jewel struck him full force on the nose, notwithstanding his dodging, and tore off a piece of the none too superfluous flesh on that large-boned facial ornament, and then drew blood across his cheek, raising a great weal in its track.

Overawed by the rest, the injured man made no effort at retaliation, but retired to the further end of the cave to restore his ugly visage to a state of comparative serenity, contenting himself meantime with the evilest of glances and the grimmest of smiles.

"'Tis a spirited lad, Didron!" said one of the men, addressing the chief after the roar of laughter at my act of defiance had subsided. "Methinks he would make us a handy novice aboard ship."

"Art right there," answered Didron, meditatively stroking his tawny, tangled beard; "yet I should like to know how he came hither. Thought I that he belonged to any who have discovered our hiding-place, I'd put an inch of cold steel across his gullet before I threw him out."

"'Twould be safest to cut his conceited throat in any case, and so make sure," growled Zerah, from the semi-darkness.

"Right, old curmudgeon!" said another, checked abruptly, however, by Didron, who said:

"As Nimno has remarked, the lad is plucky, and has a stout heart; we will take him to ship with us, and he shall join our band, when he shall have come to years of discretion."

So I was put into a corner and thrown something to eat, my masters having more weighty matters on which to talk.

One of the earthenware jars was full to the brim.

In a few days we put to sea, reaching their ship from the bottom of the steps by a couple of boats.

She was a long, low, murderous-looking craft, with high curving ends, the stem terminating in the graven head of a hideous tiger, with glaring eyes and gaping jaws showing

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the sharp gleaming teeth. On either side of the vessel was a bank of oars, pulled by fifty captives, bound together and constantly urged on by the application of a knotted leathern thong. For use when the wind was favourable she carried a huge lateen sail, which put us through the water swiftly as a shark after its prey. The crew, apart from the hundred miserable galley slaves, numbered two hundred brawny-armed, iron-souled, rough-looking fellows, mostly with dark, grizzled beards, and scarred, weather-beaten countenances, telling of many a storm encountered, many a fierce brush with foe on land and sea, and many a deed of evil import.

In fine, they were a gang of pirates, who harried the southern seas and the southern shores of Atlantis, the ship on which I was embarked was their stock-in-trade, the *Ravager*, and the cave I had so opportunely discovered was their secret treasure storehouse, wherein was hidden the gold and silver and precious stones that they could not at once dispose of. And a very secure hiding-place it was.

As I have said, it could not be seen from the cliff above, nor reached from the sand below when the tide was out, nor could a ship get near enough to enable its crew to discern its whereabouts if they did not know where to look. As the *Ravager* stood out into the offing I noticed that the strip of sand, upon which I had battled for my life with the rising waters, was unreachable by any direction than from seaward, being rounded off at each end by bold, jutting headlands, standing out sharply against the great green sea beyond.

With sails stretched taut by the favouring breeze, to the great delight of the hapless slaves, the *Ravager* ploughed her way across the ocean, and after many quiet days cast anchor in the harbour of a solitary islet lost in the immensity of the tropic sea. This was the pirates' home, where their wives and children lived, secure from the vigilance of the royal warships.

Here in this lovely spot, Didron the Chief adopted me as his son, in lieu of one who was dead, naming me Arnon, after the lost one, and bidding me be as a brother to little Viol, his only living child. This I gladly promised, feeling myself almost a man, in spite of my scanty years. Then, after a short rest, the anchor was upheaved, and the *Ravager* once more stood out into the trackless waste of waters.

The pirates had not met with much good-fortune of late, and their settlement needed things other than diamonds and gold. Also many of the crew had no wives in the islet, but had love-maids in distant ports. So all hands were willing and ready to spread the sail and clean the decks and polish their weapons, singing a rude war-chant the while, as the ship swept out of sight of their island home.

CHAPTER II.

The Son of a Sea-King.

Merrily sped the ship on the dancing waves as the sun climbed higher and higher in the heavens; loudly groaned the hundred slaves, and louder yelled the crew, when the wind failed, the lateen flapped idly on the mast, and the hundred oars dipped in and out of the water with a rhythmic sound.

Little Viol, my foster-sister, went with us on my first trip. Didron would rather she had not, but the little maid was wilful and spoilt through having no mother to keep her waywardness in check, and insisted so strongly and wept so prettily that the stern-faced chief was fain to yield to her intreaties. So she came on board to gladden our hearts, to amuse us with her quaint sayings, and vex us with her ceaseless questionings.

On that first voyage she and I struck up a boy and girl courtship, to the great relish of the crew, who teased us both unmercifully. But little we cared for that; I, indeed, answering jest with jest and taunt with taunt, for, feeling secure in Didron's protectorship, and finding, moreover, that the rugged-mannered pirates liked me all the better for my bluster and sharp tongue, I grew intensely conceited, and spoke and behaved as if on equal terms with every man on board.

Dear little Viol! I think I see her now as she looked through all those busy years I fought with the pirates and grew to manhood's age and stature. Small she always was, but sweet and dainty, as though such loveliness must needs be dealt out to the world in little quantities. Her wavy, sunny hair streamed down her shoulders in luxurious masses, seeming to clothe her in a garment of brightest gold, and to crown her head with an amber glow. Her cheeks were mantled with the rosy tinge of southern blood, and her eyes shone softly beneath their delicate arches as the eyes of a timid fawn. Small wonder is it that I braved a thousand daily torments on her behalf! E'en now, when her memory is overshadowed by a deeper, stronger, more abiding love, the memory of little Viol can sometimes give my heart a flutter, and set my soul a-longing for what can nevermore be.

Foremost amongst my tormentors was surly Zerah, whose face still bore the scar where my missile had struck him, and for which he never forgave me. Day after day, and especially when Didron's glance was averted, the great brute would pour out his clumsy jokes and blunt-edged jeers, and set me to work on the most irksome tasks, all of which insults I treasured up in my revengeful mind, waiting my time to pay him back in earnest.

As the years sped on, I grew in strength and skill. My hand was cool and steady in the whirl of the fiercest fight, my thews and sinews toughened and enlarged till I could hold out a full-sized man at arm's length and think light of it, and one stern grasp of my iron fingers round a foeman's throat could squeeze out his very life. I was also tall and broad of chest, and when I gained my twentieth year and stood on the threshold of full manhood I was the strongest, most daring, and most trusted of all that jolly band, so that Didron himself, feeling the chill of age creeping on him, looked upon me as his successor, and sometimes, when his life-blood coursed more sluggishly than was its wont, sent me out with the *Ravager* under my own command. Then, when the pirate-spirit came strongly upon him again and the thirst for action thrilled through all his veins, the old war-dog would once more take his place, tramping the deck of the good old ship with an air of mastery, and interlarding his orders with a profusion of words strong as the stiffest breeze that ever blew on the briny sea.

On one of these latter occasions, after we had stowed the treasure of three deep-laden argosies within our secret cave, Zerah and I found means to end our quarrel.

I was talking to Viol on the open deck while she busily plied her distaff, seeming but careless of my presence, though at intervals not very far apart, when our eyes met, mine read love writ plain in hers; when, in the midst of our quiet communing, like an ice-cold hurricane tearing through a leafy summer glade, came Zerah, chaffing and grumbling, and setting my teeth on edge with his cantankerous lugubrations.

At last, finding that I heeded not his sneers, he lost his temper, abusing me, and then my little Viol, as bitterly as his evil tongue could wag.

"'Tis a pretty sight," he said, with a fiendish smile, "to see our novice a-mooning about and taking his ease like a noble, when his betters have to shoulder-to and work in fair weather or foul! And 'tis a better thing that this yellow-haired chit should be aboard to keep your idleness in countenance. Surely I think our chief has no shame left, that he flaunts his love-child here in our faces!"

"Gods!" I cried, springing to my feet and snatching my sword from my belt, "look to yourself, viper, for by the beard of Amarunth, I'll wash out this insult in your life's blood!"

I had suffered his tormenting and clumsy jokes long enough, but when he turned his vile tongue against my

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darling and mocked at her motherlessness, the cup of my anger was full and my wrath was roused to action,

Then out flashed his sword, and the bright blades struck fire as we crossed them in savage shock, and then stood still, glaring and watchful, as old Didron, marking the jostle of arms, came hurrying up. He asked what made us fight, and a chorus of voices told him, for Zerah's coward sneer had been overheard by more than one.

"But that Arnon has taken up the sword against you, accursed wretch, this once stout arm, old though it be, should cut you to the earth like a stalk of corn," was all the old man dare trust himself to say to Zerah, thereafter bidding us go on.

But now Viol rushed between us and clung to me with all the feverish strength of a fearful maid, imploring, bewailing, beseeching, sobbing, intreating me not to put myself in danger, till I was well-nigh unmanned and my steadiness of nerve was gone, while Zerah stood and watched us, a confident grin upon his swarthy features. With a cry I roughly shook off my troublesome maid, who was at once seized by Didron, and, grasping my sword more firmly, I turned to my enemy.

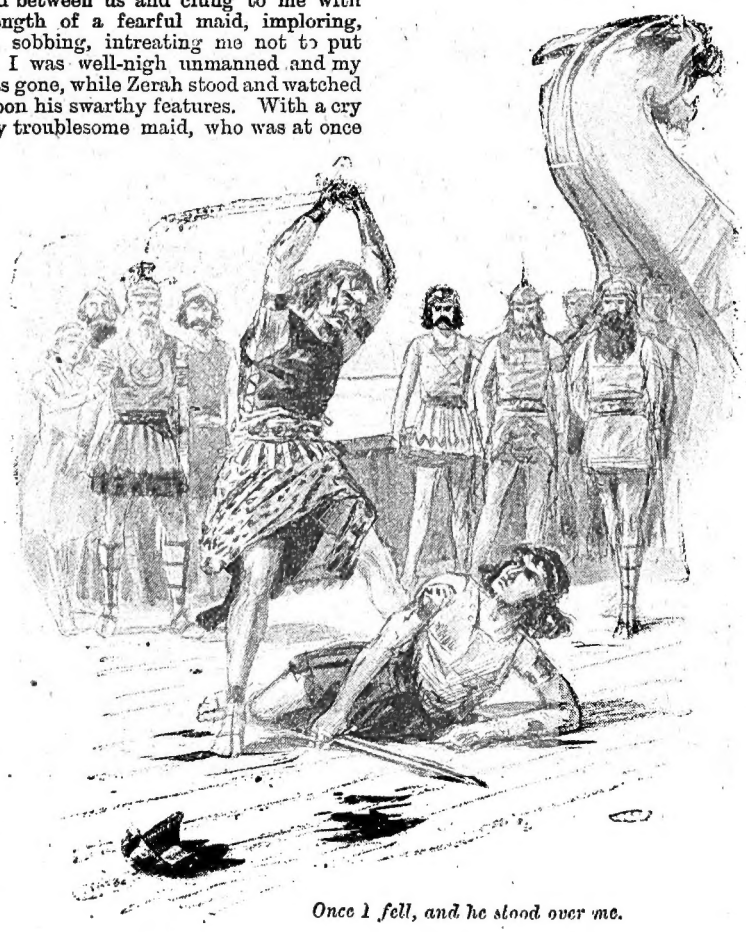
"Now, miserable wretch," I cried, "prepare to enter the shadows, for by all the Spirits you shall not live to see to-morrow's sun."

"Now, insufferable cur," he answered, his face livid with rage, "nerve yourself to feel the jaws of the monsters of the deep, for their prey shall you be before night falls."

Then we began in deadly earnest, thrusting, cutting, parrying, fencing, springing, advancing, and retreating, till the red blood flowed about the deck from each of us, and our arms grew weary with the struggle, though for a time neither gained advantage. Once I fell, and he stood over me with arm raised high to strike the fatal blow, but before the hissing blade had cleft the air one half its journey I had kicked his foot from beneath him, prostrating him headlong at my side. Once I had him on his knee, and the point of my weapon at his breast, but ere I could send the sharp steel home he had wriggled out of my grasp like an oily snake and stood upon the deck.

I began to perceive that my strength was matched by his skill, my youthful energy by his sober experience, and remembering that muscle is sometimes overcome by cunning, I resolved to save my strength and tire him out. On this our combat became a slow one of feints and passes and wary watchings for a false move, and of this my foeman tired, seeing as well as I that I must surely wear him down. So with a shout he threw himself upon me, sword and dagger and all, and down I went under him like a sapling felled by a single stroke of the woodman's axe, my blade flying out of my fingers a dozen paces down the deck. Then up at him I sprang like a tiger-cat, fastening one hand upon the wrist that held the dagger (I feared not his sword at such close quarters), and the other upon his throat. These I grasped and held like a leech, wavering not one item in my forceful clasp for all his writhing and plunging and his ashen face, for now my strength and build began to tell.

Soon his sword dropped from his free hand, his dagger fell from his nerveless fingers, his eyeballs rolled in horrid motions, his heart ceased to struggle, his breath stopped in the narrow passage I held so tightly, and Zerah lay still at my side.



Once I fell, and he stood over me.

Thereupon out broke the crew into a cheer, and old Didron called me his son, bidding me throw the carcase out to the sharks; and little Viol knelt by me and wept tears of joy for my safety, and, woman-like, a tear of pity for the wretch I had slain. But of all these voices I heeded only Didron's, and lifting the lifeless body high in the air, flung it overboard as far as my enfeebled arms would allow.

We were then sailing through a blue sea thickly covered with lumps of yellow weed, in which said weed live countless hordes of little crabs of the same sickly hue, and as the hideous body sank beneath the weeds, then for a moment came to the top again, out poured these ugly creatures, crawling over the carcase. When I saw this I said:

"So may all such wretches perish!"

And old Didron bowed low his head, thanking the gods for having given him such a son and rid him of such a pestilent follower.

Oh! it was a stirring life, was ours, in the days when buccaneering was an honest trade and a pirate was an honourable man. True, we waylaid ships and took their treasure and their women and slaughtered their crews if they resisted us, and made raids on the littoral towns, but so, in sooth, did our enemies the warships of the king if so it happened that they stood in need of men, or arms, or food, and made no discrimination, whilst we were ever ready to aid the poor and the distressed, wherefore many a needy fisherman would liever see a pirate ship upon his horizon than a vessel with the royal flag.

Yes! ours was a happy life when all is said and done. 'Twas calm and peaceful when we lay at ease in our fairy

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isle, drinking the sweets of success, and disporting ourselves with our wives and sweethearts, while the good ship was being repaired and fitted for her coming voyage; 'twas better when we sallied forth and laid tribute heavily upon the vessels of the rich merchants who plied between Atlantis and the spice-laden East; 'twas better still when the *Ravager* cast anchor in the harbour of a wealthy town and levied blackmail to a fabulous amount upon the trembling citizens; but 'twas best of all when we met a pirate-foe upon the sea—a rival who dared to hunt within our chosen waters—and with crashing of timbers and riddling of sails, with fierce clashes of arms and shouts of hatred upon men's tongues plentifully as beads thickly-strung upon a thread, our tiger-headed ship rushed on to battle and to victory!

Then did the blood course swiftly through the willing veins, and the hand grasp weapons eagerly, and woe to the foemen who crossed our path when the pirates' wrath was roused, for come sun or rain, or calm or direst storm, we jolly fellows rested not until our rage was quenched in streams and pools of reddest gore!

Sorrowfully I write this, looking back through all the years, and fain would have you bear in mind that we were not always in such angry mood. For our own sakes that was well.

A week had scarce gone since I had thrown Zerah to the crabs, when, it being my watch in the early morn, I saw a ship bearing down upon us with all the speed the slaves could row, and pressing hard behind, twenty lengths from her stern, a royal warship foaming through the water, her five hundred oars sweeping the sea with majestic regularity. It was a fellow pirate, pursued by a ship of the king. Not a moment did old Didron hesitate.

"Grappling-irons ready!" roared the old sea-king, his grey eyes sparkling with joy at the coming fight. "Art blind?" he went on impatiently, seeing the men hang back. "See not 'tis our old friend Sanaboul? On, then, and shear off the enemy's oars!"

The men sprang forward at this, all eagerness, and down we bore upon the pair of flying vessels. Sanaboul saw us, guessing our intent, and so, when he reached us, slewed round his ship till both our prows pointed to the oncoming foe. As we rode together, with barely the breadth of the oars between us, Sanaboul called from his deck:

"Good cheer, old comrade, thou comest but just in time!"

The old sea-dog answered that the last hour of the day is better than no time to-morrow. "And," said he, "if we strive but well, the king shall know of what mettle we seamen are made. Ha! ha!"

Now our ships parted slightly, and resting on our oars (for it was a dead calm) we stood silent, waiting the coming of the great warship. Then, when her prow was near upon us, our vessels sprang forward and closed inward upon her with a sudden shock, shipping oars as we touched, and one on either side of her we tore along, grinding slowly down her banks of oars, splintering, breaking and cracking them as though they were twigs dried in the sun, and hurling the luckless slaves in her hold, hither and thither in wild confusion, breaking the limbs of many, and killing not a few. And when we got alongside, our men who steadied the chains, threw the hooks and grip irons over the bulwarks, making the vessels fast, so that the royal ship was locked in our embrace. And then from both sides we poured in upon her with shouts of defiance.

Then began a struggle long and terrible, for our two crews together did not so much as equal the number of our foes, and these, moreover, were greatly helped by having a score of expert slingers in the rigging, and at the prow and stern, from whence their leaden bullets fell amongst us like a deadly hail. But fiercely we fought, chanting the *Ina-ana*, or war song of the seas, and ever as we battled our feet were planted further on their deck. Soon we met our friends from the further side, and Sanaboul stood side by side with Didron, as wild and dangerous a pair of tough old warriors as ever trod the timbers of a worthy craft.

Together strove that brawny couple, plying their swords so well upon the host of foes that it seemed as though they stood in the harvest field, mowing down the corn shaken by the wind. And like a field of corn blown here and there, yet coming no nearer, was that host of enemies. For a time no hurt came to these two, yet at each cut or thrust of their long, keen blades a foeman fell upon the slippery deck, and of all who fell none ever rose again, for behind and about them pressed we, with all the lust of blood in us, like wolves howling for their prey.

Now we had cleared the slingers from the stern, and cut down the mast which held the sail ropes, so that only the forward end of the royal ship was held by her crew, and seeing this, and that they were fast losing ground, their leader pressed to the front, and, grasping his huge, heavy-bladed axe, fell upon our chiefs fighting in the midst of the turmoil. They saw him, and both blades leapt up, like lightning flashes, to ward off that fearful blow. Like a reed snapped by a falling oak Sanaboul's sword broke short in his hand, and the awful weapon, crashing down through leathern helm and head and armour, clove through his body as though a splitted block of wood, and, falling to the deck, was there transfixed, quivering.

'Twas a mighty stroke, such as I have never seen since, but by its own greatness it cost that chief his life, for before he could wrench it from the deck, Didron's blade, with the swiftness of a thought, had cut his head in twain. With a wild cry of exultation, I placed myself at my leader's side.

"Well done, my son," said he; "but seek not to guard me. I feel that my hour has come now that my friend is dead. Yet I—I shall make my grave amongst the bones of our enemies."

How we wrought that day against those stern and bearded warriors of the king! At last we bore them down and slew them, one and all, till not an armed foe remained on board. But—maledictions on the evil thing—a fatal bullet from a sling guided by the hand of Amarunth, the god of death, sent Didron to join his friend in the Land of Shadows, even as the victory was nearly won.

Then, with one consent, they made me, Arnon, their leader, and for want of men to work both ships, what remained of Sanaboul's crew, with much persuasion, came on board the *Ravager;* and their ship, together with the royal vessel, we sank by boring auger holes in the barnacle-covered bottoms. The slaves of both vessels and the wounded of our enemies went down with them, for we were not minded that any news of our deed should reach Atlantis, lest we brought down stern revenge upon ourselves and our wives and children.

But how those wretches shrieked and cried for help and mercy as they felt the ships sink under them, and the water creep higher and higher! It makes my blood chill even now, when I recall that mad, despairing yell. Some, indeed, sprang overboard, but such soon perished, either by the sharks or the arrows of my men, and the rest, for all their fear, ventured not to meet their end that way.

That was the dark side of my pirate life, and now, scanning it from the vantage point of a life's experience, I shudder at my own misdoings, and wonder that the earth has borne with me so long.

After making sundry further captures I returned to our island home, taking with me the sorrowing Viol and the body of the old chief. We buried him with Sanaboul, on the slope of the little hill where our olden leaders lay, and being now enriched by our long, successful cruise, we rested from our voyaging for a year and a half, till our wounds and sicknesses were healed and cured, and by which time fully two-score of the young men who did not yet know more of the sea than the smell of it, were ready to take ship with us.

(To be continued.)

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KEY TO JUMBLED STORY NO. 11.

TOO MUCH BLUE.

SEE PAGE 442.

Early on a fine summer morning, an old man was walking on the road between Brussels and Namus.

Having a good deal of time to spare, he amused himself by watching the operations of a painter, who, mounted on a ladder placed against the front of a wayside inn, was busily employed in depicting a sign suitable to its name, "The Rising Sun."

The old man commenced walking backwards and forwards before the inn, the painter, meantime, continuing to lay on fresh coats of the brightest blue, which appeared to aggravate the old gentleman very much.

At length, when the sign-painter took another brush full of blue paint to plaster on, the spectator could endure it no longer, and exclaimed severely:

"Too much blue!"

The painter looked down from his perch, and said, in that tone of forced calmness which an angry man sometimes assumes:

"Monsieur does not perceive that I am painting a sky."

"Oh, yes, I see very well you are trying to paint a sky; but I tell you again there is too much blue!"

"By St. Gudula, this is too much!" exclaimed the painter, coming down from his ladder, at no pains this time to conceal his anger; "I should like to see how *you* would paint skies without blue."

"I don't pretend to much skill in sky-painting; but, if I were to make a trial, I wouldn't put in too much blue."

"I tell you what, old gentleman," cried the insulted artist, crossing his maul-stick over his shoulder, and looking very fierce, "I dare say you are a very worthy fellow when you are at home; but you should not be let out—alone."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the critic, as he snatched the palette from the painter's hand. "You deserve to have your portrait painted, to serve for the sign of the 'Flemish Ass!'" In his indignation he mounted the ladder with the activity of a boy, and, with the palm of his hand, effaced the *chef d'œuvre* of Gerald Douw's great grandson's third cousin.

Then, using merely the point of his finger and the handle of a brush, he sketched, in masterly outline, three Flemish boors, with beer-glasses in their hands, drinking to the rising sun, which appeared above the horizon, dispersing the gloom of a greyish morning sky. One of the faces presented a strong and laughable caricature of the supplanted sign-painter.

The owner of the inn was the first to cry "Bravo!" and even Gerard Douw's cousin nine times removed felt his fury calming down into admiration.

The old man was about to descend from the ladder, when a gentleman, riding an English horse, made his way through the crowd.

"That painting is mine!" he exclaimed in French, but with a foreign accent. "I will give a hundred guineas for it!"

"Another madman," exclaimed the native genius. "Hang me, but all these foreigners are mad!"

"What do you mean, monsieur?" said the innkeeper, uncommonly interested.

"What I say—I will give one hundred guineas for that painting," answered the young Englishman, getting off his horse.

"That picture is not to be sold," said the sign-painter, with an air of as much pride as if it had been his own work.

"No," quoth mine host, "for it is already sold, and even partly paid for in advance. However, if monsieur wishes to come to an arrangement about it, it is with me that he must treat."

"Not at all, not at all," rejoined the Flemish painter of signs, "it belongs to me. My fellow-artist here gave me a little help out of friendship; but the picture is my lawful property, and I am at liberty to sell it to anyone I please."

"What roguery!" exclaimed the innkeeper. "'Rising Sun' is my property. Fastened on the wall of my house, how can it belong to anybody else? Isn't it painted on my boards? No one but myself has the smallest right to it."

"But suppose that *I* don't choose to have it sold?" said its real author.

"Oh, my dear monsieur!" said the innkeeper, "I am certain you would not wish to deprive an honest, poor man, who can scarcely make both ends meet, of this windfall. Why, it would just enable me to lay in a good stock of wine and beer."

"Don't believe him, brother," cried the painter; "he is an old miser. I am the father of a family; and, being a painter, you ought to help a brother artist, and give me the preference. Besides, I am ready to share the money with you."

"He!" said Master Martzen. "Why, he's an old spendthrift, who has no money left to give his daughter as a marriage portion, because he spends all he gets on himself."

"No such thing; my Susette is betrothed to an honest young French cabinet-maker, who, poor as she is, will marry her next September."

"A daughter to portion!" exclaimed the stranger artist; "that quite alters the case. I am content that the picture should be sold for a marriage portion. I leave it to our English friend's generosity to fix the sum."

"I have already offered," replied the best bidder, "one hundred guineas for the sketch just as it is. I will gladly give two hundred for it if the painter will consent to sign it in the corner with one word."

"What word?" exclaimed all the disputants at once.

The Englishman replied:

"Meissonier."

The whole party were quiet enough now, for they were struck dumb with astonishment. The sign-painter held his breath, glared with his eyes, frantically clasped his hands together, and fell down on his knees before the great French painter.

"Forgive me!" he exclaimed, "forgive me for my audacious ignorance."

Meissonier laughed heartily; and, taking his hand, shook it with fraternal cordiality.

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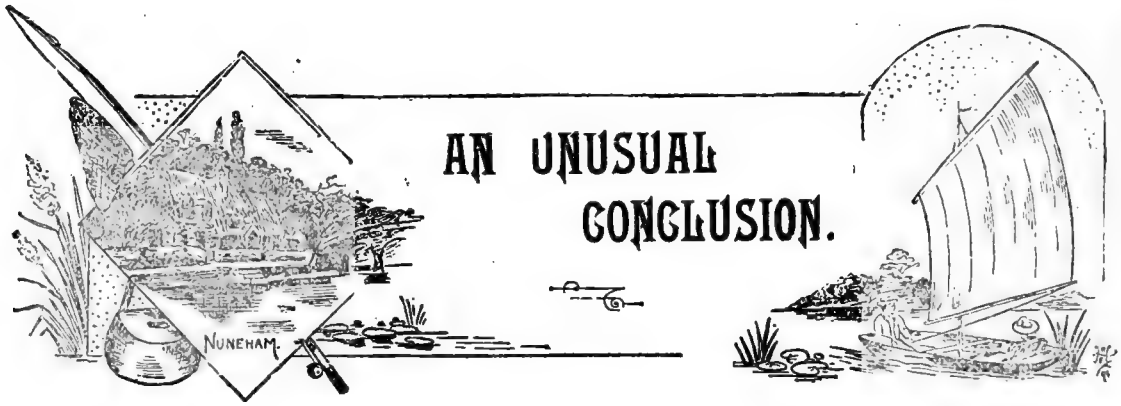

AN UNUSUAL CONCLUSION.

Mr. Clarke Randolph was stupefied by a discovery which he had just made—his wife no longer loved him, and the man who had stolen her from him was his nearest friend, Henry Stockton. If there had been the least chance for a doubt, the unhappy husband would have seized upon it, but there was none whatever.

Let us try to understand what this meant to such a man as Randolph. He was a high-bred, high-spirited man of thirty, descended from a long line of proud and chivalrous men, educated, refined, sensitive, generous and brave. His fine talents, his dash, his polished manner, his industry, his integrity, his loftiness of character, had lifted him upon the shoulders of popularity and prosperity.

He had been married four years. His wife was beautiful, winsome, and intelligent; and she had always had from him the best devotion that a husband could give his wife. He and Stockton had been friends for many years. Next to his wife, Randolph had loved and trusted him above all others.

Such was the situation. At one stroke he had lost his wife, his home, his best friend, his confidence in human nature, his spirit, his ambition. These—and essentially they were all that made up his life, except the operation of purely animal functions—had gone all at once, without a moment's warning.

Well, there was something to be done. A keen sense of the betrayal, a smarting under the gross humiliation, urged him to the natural course of revenge. This, as he sat crouched down in a chair in his locked office, he began systematically to arrange, struggling earnestly to bring his mind under control and direct his thoughts into coherent forms. The first idea—always first in such cases—was to kill. That, in the case of a man of his spirit and temperament, was a matter of course. Fear of the legal consequences found no place within him. Besides, suicide would settle that exceedingly small part of the difficulty.

So it was first decided that as the result of this discovery three persons had to die—his wife, his friend, and himself. Very well; that took a load from his mind. An orderly and intelligent arrangement of details now had to be worked out. A plan which would bring the largest results in the satisfaction of a desire for revenge must be chosen. The simple death of these two, the bare stoppage of breath, would be wholly inadequate. First, the manner of taking their lives must have the quality of strength and a force which in itself would have a large element of satisfaction; hence it must be striking, deliberate, brutal, if you wish; revolting, if you are particular. Second, it must be preceded by exposure, denunciation, publication, scorn, contempt, and terror.

Randolph was in the act of leaving his office to go and buy a revolver, when he was startled by what he saw in his office mirror. It required a moment for him to recognise his own reflection. His face was unnaturally white, a discolouration was under his eyes, which had a glassy appearance, his lips were pressed tightly together, the corners of his mouth drawn down, large dark veins standing out on his temples. Fearing that if, while in this condition, he should apply to a gunsmith for a revolver, he would be refused, he stood for some time before the mirror trying to restore the natural expression of his face. He kneaded his lips to remove their stiffness, pinched his cheeks to bring back their colour, rubbed down the ridged veins, and scraped a little of the white plaster from the wall, and with it concealed the dark colour under his eyes. Then he went forth with a firm step, bought the revolver without difficulty, tried it, satisfied himself that it was reliable, loaded it, put it into his pocket, and returned to his office.

For there were certain matters of property to be attended to. He had a considerable fortune, all his separate posession; his wife had brought him nothing. He now felt clear minded enough to dispose of his estate intelligently. He drew his will—a holographic instrument—devising his wealth to various persons and benevolent sccieties.

He glanced at his office clock. There would be four long hours yet before the time for going home to dinner. How should Randolph employ these weary hours? There was nothing to do, nothing even to think of. He tried to read a newspaper, then a book, and failed; looked out upon the crowds which thronged Princes Street; counted the cabs awhile; tried other things, failed at everything and then sat down.

Something was beginning to work in the wretched man. Let us see! His wife, whilst pretending the warmest affection for him, was receiving the attentions of a traitor in the house; she had wrecked his life, had driven him to his death. Really, therefore, she had swept aside all the obligations which the marital relation imposed. In essence she was no longer his wife, but a criminal enemy, who, with deliberate and abounding malice, had destroyed him. He could go to the grave with a willing heart, but he could not permit her to live and enjoy his downfall and gloat over his destruction. But would she really do that? And then, she was a woman!

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In spite of all that she had done, she was a woman. A strong man, his strength reinforced by a revolver, employs deception to bring a woman into a room, locks the door, insults, humiliates, and terrifies her, brandishes a revolver, and then kills her like a rat in its hole. Can a brave man, of mature judgment and in possession of his faculties, do such a thing? Why, it would not only be murder, but cowardice as well. No; it could not be done. She was still a woman, with all the weakness, all the frailty which her sex imposed. It could not be done.

After all, it would be far sweeter revenge to let her live, bearing through life a brand of infamy. That would be much better. She would lose her high position and the respect of her friends; the newspapers would publish her shame to the world, pointing her out by name as the depraved woman who had betrayed her husband and driven him to suicide; they would have her portrait in their columns; her name and crime would be hawked in the street by loud-crying newsboys. Not only that, but she would be stripped of all the property which she had enjoyed so much. She would be turned adrift upon the streets, for no one would help her, none have a kind word for her, none give her even the respect which money might command. Being thus turned out upon the world all friendless and alone, and soon taking to drink, as such women always do, down she would plunge into a reckless career, sinking lower and lower, losing her beauty, becoming coarse, loud, and vulgar—such a life would be infinitely worse than death, such a revenge immeasurably vaster than the pistol. Then it was finally decided that she must live and suffer.

The man who had stolen her from him.

As to the friend—as to Stockton, the betrayer, the sneak, the coward—*he* should die like a dog. *That* decision could not be reconsidered.

These things being settled, the wretched man re-read the will. As the woman was to live, she must be mentioned in the document. He tore up the will and wrote another, in which he bequeathed her one shilling. Then he wrote out a separate statement of the whole affair, sealed it, addressed it to the coroner, and placed it in his pocket. It would be found there after a while.

Well, why this trembling in every member, this unaccountable nausea, this unconquerable feeling of horror and repugnance as the draft of the picture was contemplated? Did instinct arise and dumbly plead for mercy? What mercy had been shown that mercy could be expected? None whatever. There was not only revenge to be satisfied, but justice also. Still, it was horrible! Admit that she deserved it all, deserved even more, she was a woman! No act of hers could deprive her of her natural claims upon the stronger sex. As a woman she had inalienable rights which even she could not forfeit, which men could not withhold. And then, where could be the benefit of adding physical sufferings to mental? One surely would weaken the force of the other. The lower she should fall and the deeper her degradation, the smaller would become the efficiency of her mental agony; and yet mental suffering was the kind which it was desired should fall upon her.

It would be well, therefore, to leave her some money—a considerable amount of money—in order that, holding herself above the want which in her case would lead to degradation and a blunting of the sensibilities, she might suffer all the more keenly—in order that the memory of her shame might be for ever poignant, for ever a cause for the sharpest regrets. This would be better in other ways; her shame published, she could never associate with those fine characters who had been her friends; her lover dead and his memory disgraced, he could not be present to console her; for society she would have only those whom her fortune would attract, and they were not of a kind to satisfy such a woman as she; she would always be within sight of the old life and its pleasures, but just beyond the pale—near enough to see and long for, but too far to reach, and for ever kept back by the cold glance of contempt, the disdain of the high circle in which she had been reared.

Therefore, it was better to leave her the bulk of his fortune. So he tore up the second will, and wrote a

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third, in which, while naming her as his principal legatee he incorporated the story of her shame. He felt better now than at any time since his discovery. He walked about the room, looked out of the window, then sank into his chair again.

Then, having faced the proposition that he had been considering his own case all along, he found the situation to be somewhat like this: He had a certain understanding which should operate to remove him from influences which with men of inferior conceptions would be more powerful; not being a brute, he should rise above impulses which a brute is constrained by its nature to obey. So much was clear. Then, what should he do? He pondered this long and seriously.

Was it possible to wipe out the past with exposure, humiliation, shame, and blood? He had been proud of her, he had loved her, he had been very, very happy with her. She had been his inspiration, a part of his hopes, his ambition, his life. True, she had undone all this, but the memory of it remained. Until this recent act she had been kind, unselfish, gentle, and faithful. Who could sound the depths of this strange mystery; who measure the capacity of her resistance; who judge her frailty with a righteous mind; who say that at that very moment she was not suffering unspeakable things? And then, was there anyone so noble of character, with integrity so unfailing and so far beyond temptation, that he might say he was better than she? Compassion is an attribute of a noble character. The test of manhood is the exercise of its qualities.

What good would come from this revenge of humiliation and exposure? It would not mend the wrong, it would not save life; it would be only proof of the vanity, the sense of self importance of the injured one. Would it be possible to spare her? Yes. That finally was settled. She should live, she should have the property, she should be left to enjoy life as best she could without the shadow of stain upon her name. That were the nobler part, the test of manhood. And then, the past could not be forgotten!

Randolph felt so much better after arriving at this decision that he marvelled at himself. He walked about the room feeling strong and elastic. He tore up the will because it charged her crime upon her; tore up the letter to the coroner; collected all the scraps of paper and carefully burnt them. Then he drew a new will, free from stain, leaving all his property to his wife. He did not only that, but he wrote her a letter—formal, of course—merely saying that he had found his life a mistake; this he sealed, addressed, and placed in his pocket.

Stockton—the false fiend, the betrayer and destroyer—he should die, he should die like a dog. But not with a stain on his name—that were impossible, because it would reflect upon *her*.

Here was a new situation. The two men would be found dead, likely in the same room—the friend and the husband. What would people think? A duel? For what reason? Murder and suicide! Who had handled the weapon, and for what possible cause? The road which suspicion would travel was too short and wide. The fair name of the wife was to be guarded—that had been decided upon, and now it was the first consideration.

Nor was that all. *She* loved him—that must be so. What would be the benefit of removing him from her life? It would be merely revenge—revenge upon both of them; and where lies the nobility of such revenge? If they both should live, both go unexposed, they might be happy together.

After all, whom would that disturb, whose pleasure interfere with? Surely no sound of their happiness could penetrate the grave; violence would be done to none of Nature's laws. Why should they not be happy? If they could, why should they not? Was there any reason under the sun that charity, compassion, and a high manhood could give why they should not be happy?

But suppose that she should suspect the cause of her husband's suicide; this would likely poison her life, for the consciousness of guilt would give form to suspicion. The result would be an abhorrence of self, a detestation of the participant in her sin, a belief that the blood of her husband was upon her head, and a long train of evils which would seriously impair, if not wholly destroy, the desired serenity of her life. Was there any way to prevent the birth of such a suspicion?

Yes; there was a way. As soon as Randolph had worked it out he felt as if an enormous load had been removed from him. His eyes shone brightly, his cheeks were flushed, and a look of pride and triumph lighted up his face.

He returned to his chair, removed the revolver from his pocket and laid it on the table; wrote his wife an affectionate letter, in which he told her that he had just become aware of an incurable ailment which he had not the courage to face through months or years of suffering and begged her to look to Stockton for friendship and advice; wrote to Stockton, charging him with her protection; burnt the last will that he had made and drew a new one, in which he left them the property jointly, on condition that they marry within two years. Then, with a perfectly clear head, he laid down his pen and sighed, but his face was bright and tranquil. He picked up the revolver, cocked it, placed the muzzle against his temple, and without a tremour of a nerve he pressed the trigger.

W. C. Morrow.

SEE NEXT PAGE.

Jumbled Story Competition.

No. 14.

In order to lessen the amount of work undertaken by competitors in pasting up the separate lines of the story in these competitions, each line is now numbered, and all that readers need do is to write clearly on a sheet of paper the numbers of the lines in the order they believe to be correct. The title and author's name are jumbled up, and should be correctly given. Only one attempt is permitted from each person.

The conditions are jumbled in the following paragraph as an example. The correct order of the lines is given in line 10.

1 SHORT STORIES on or before *Monday*,
2 awarded to the reader whose solution first
3 *JUMBLED STORY*.
4 Six Prizes—one of £5 and five of £1 each—are
5 *October 5th*, and envelopes must be marked
6 correct. In the event of a tie, the prizes will be
7 reaches this office.
8 All attempts to be delivered at the offices of
9 offered to the readers whose key is most nearly
10 4—9—6—2—7—8—1—5—3—12—11—13—10.
11 a sheet of paper the figures in the order they
12 Competitors in doing the story should write on
13 believe to be correct, thus:

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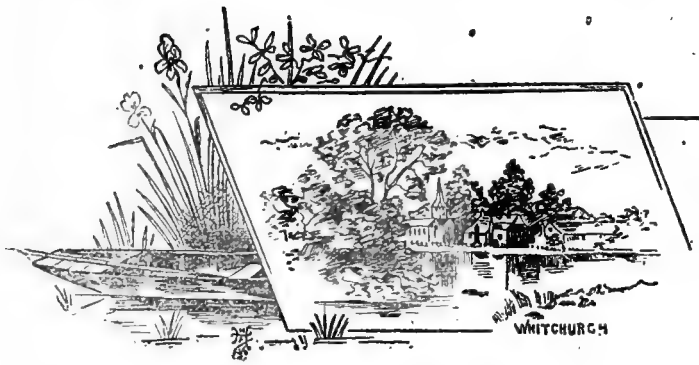

ETCHER'S CHOICE PIN.

Jumbled Story
No. 14.

In the Rose Garden were forty maidens, the dark-eyed beauty. But while the Prince talked with the hedge and came suddenly upon this lady, who blossoms, in and out of the winding paths; and borne on the wings of the bees and the breath of the nightingales.

She was happy herself, and wanted her friends to clad in pale green the colour of the new shoots on rose-petals.

In the farthest corner it was known that the flattering of a dainty dress, green, the colour of the golden hair.

Suddenly a murmur stole through the garden, the approach of the Prince, sank upon the soft moss, and, though he turned quickly into the next path pale, new shoots on the rose-trees, caught his eye. He had become quite pale. "You know," he confer great honour upon his wife, was justified in and the Prince's choice must be perfection.

A beautiful girl stood near. He spoke to her. Prince had come.

The Prince was to choose a wife.

Granting this, surely the Prince, who was to great and unusual privilege in this choice. He seeks the rose-trees.

He could not tell whether it was the sunlight course?"

Instead of following the path, the Prince parted from one fair face to another, ever pictured some noblest daughters of the kingdom.

As he passed on, a languid brunette paused at music of the wind and water, but she had no deep eyes.

The neck and shoulders were daintier than any excitement of the hour, dreading, yet longing for fairer face, hidden from sight in the winding wind!

Just then a gleam of gold through the trees again, there was nothing to be seen.

As he turned away from the fountain, the branch must have deceived him.

He was modest, and did not consider himself in his approach. He stopped to speak with the rose, and the pretty head glistened with a mass of her, he saw through the branches a slender figure, playing in her fair hair or in the heart of a rose; dazzled him.

"I wish to speak with you," said the Prince.

The lady's little hand slipped behind her.

"I must give him good and sufficient reason for are you besides the most enchanting of women? You deny yourself every virtue and every grace. You sing? I have not heard your voice; it must any way perfect; but naturally a man, however frail the selection I make. Tell me of yourself! What wonderful in any way.

No, she was not wise; the Prince was mistaken.

"I wish to put my ring on your little hand."

The lady bowed.

Such a slippery little hand! It stayed not a share in her happiness. But no! She was not too forward: one too serious; another too light—Prince would hear her later.

She was poised ready for flight; and the Prince, kissed her.

"I am your choice, and I can love you. Is it nothing of art; this one was too retiring; that one surrenders her life to his.

"But I must talk with you first," said the Prince. What are you? What can you do?"

This lady knew nothing of music; that lady knew my happiness and trusts my discretion.

No, she was not noted for benevolence and looked up with some suggestion of mutiny in her hand, as if to detain her.

"But shall your lover be less to you than your guitar was by the fountain. She could sing; the be purest melody."

No, the lady did not play. She liked to hear the word, though one by one he passed them by.

Some posed on the raised marble brim of the paths.

"Then you are fond of music? You play, of some, overcome by the perfume of the flowers, the friend?" cried the Prince. "I am unhappy! Give a careful search.

And the Prince put the ring upon her finger and continued nervously, "my father has given me a moment in his grasp, but the lady paused and had until now so successfully eluded him.

No, she did not sing, but loved to hear the fountain; some walked, with regal tread, among the who felt no inclination to seek further, caught her and cooled their feverish cheeks on the dewy enough?" she answered, smiling at him.

Quietly he entered; and his eyes, wandering was, it vanished so quickly that he fancied a waving he be, expects perfection in the woman who 'Twas only a momentary glimpse, for, whatever it me peace by telling why I should choose you. She answered with easy grace. Yes, she played; her patience with her guitar.

Yet for each and all the Prince had a graceful charity.

BESSIE LOUECHER.

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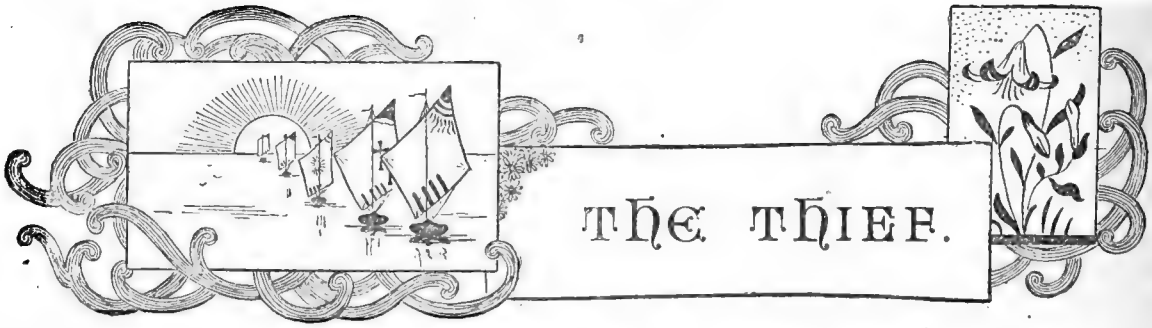

THE THIEF.

It was Saturday evening, and a few intimate friends had just had their cup of tea in the pretty little apartment of Madame Gilbert in the Rue de Rennes.

Two years had already passed since the death of Colonel Gilbert. His widow lived modestly and quietly, concentrating all the affection of her romantic soul upon her son André. He was scarcely eighteen, of a delicate constitution, somewhat weakened by too rapid growth, and had not yet ceased to show towards his mother the most demonstrative affection and an almost timid respect.

He was a fresh-faced boy, whose blushes came quite charmingly in the society of ladies. This evening the gathering was a little more numerous than on most Saturdays, but still entirely informal, and Madame Gilbert's tiny parlour looked especially dainty and attractive. Madame, herself, was quietly and gracefully attentive to the unexpressed wants of her guests, and moved among them, a charming presence, in the rich, perfected beauty of her thirty-five years.

Suddenly a friend of André, who had been seated on a cushioned seat by the window, bent forward to listen to some sound outside. The strident voice of a newspaper vendor could be heard in the street intoning——

"Here y'are! Just out! Full account of the horrible murder of a ra-r-r-r-ra!"

The end of the sentence was lost in the roar of a passing omnibus. A moment later the same voice repeated its doleful chant.

In the parlour all listened, and each tried to be the one to distinguish the end of the phrase. After several ineffectual attempts the auditors smiled at one another, shook their heads, and gave it up, and the conversation was resumed, while the clamour gradually died away in the distance.

"It is the same story every day," said some one. "A new murder, a new victim. I should like to add a new prisoner; but that would not be true, under the present conditions of impunity in crime."

The man who had just spoken immediately obliterated his face behind his large cup, below which appeared his short, black beard, streaked with grey. He was a former prefect of the Empire, and was well known by most present to have been an admirer of Madame Gilbert before her marriage—and after it, some said. However, he had disappeared for some time, and this was the first evening he had joined the little circle to offer salutations to his former friend. He had been received in the presence of all graciously, without surprise or effusion, or apparent resentment.

A member of the Institute replied to him:

"I do not know if the Government is really responsible in these matters. At all events, it is discouraging to consider that in spite of the most perfect laws, and in spite of whatever personal precautions we may adopt, our very existence is constantly at the mercy of an violent scoundrel we may meet."

"Yes," said Madame Gilbert, "we have all our plans for the future. We guard our health and our resources; it sometimes seems as if we might spare ourselves the trouble."

"A madman passes," suggested a red-ribboned violinist, "and a vagabond bullet from the revolver he is wildly brandishing lands in my head!"

"Or else," adds the large and comfortable wife of the academician, "a discharged cook revenges herself by a last seasoning to our salad."

Madame Gilbert enumerated still other general cases.

"Sometimes it is a beggar who kills you without any special animosity, and sometimes, on the other hand, it is a wretch who has no other excuse but his hatred——"

"Or his love," concluded the ex-prefect, with a vague, sad smile.

Then it was who could relate the most anecdotes founded upon experience, upon reading, or upon the tales of some absent friend. Murders were recalled which had been committed in railway-carriages, in boxes at the theatre, in private rooms at restaurants. Night attacks were recounted—servants who had choked their masters, in flagrant violation of the best recommendations; finally, a miscellaneous assortment of parricides, fratricides, and infanticides.

Insensibly the gathering had become tragic. The newsboy's voice, as he repassed across the street, startled them again. The guests had by this time risen to go, and as they said good-night some of them told of the particular terrors which had always haunted them. A lady, who had a pretty talent for painting on porcelain, confessed frankly:

"Nothing frightens me like the thought of those frightful wretches who slip into your room with a false key, or by forcing the door. I am hardly in bed before this terror seizes me. I try to sleep, but my fear is too strong. Oh! Heavens! if my door should slowly and mysteriously open! And if a face should appear, as pale as my own, but set, fierce and determined! My mind sees this face clearly. Every night its features appear before me. Ah! if it should become a reality to-night, to-morrow night, what should I do? What should I say? What would become of me?"

The two blonde daughters of this lady surrounded her with a charming expression of saucy courage.

"Yes, yes, darlings," sighed their mother. "We three wouldn't amount to much if a thief got among us."

"I know what I should do," said the elder. "If that happened, I should just pretend I was asleep, so there!"

"For me," said the younger, "I should be afraid of betraying myself, if only from curiosity. Oh! I am sure

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I should risk at least one eye. Then I should say very quietly: 'Mr. Thief, take all you want to from here. I shall not stir; I shall make no outcry, if only you don't touch me!'"

"This kind of apprehension," said Madame Gilbert, "has never troubled me. For one thing, I have faith in my safety-locks, and then I know thieves are such cowards that that makes me brave. Still, Madame, I have, like you, the uneasy loneliness of a widow."

"But," interrupted the other, "you are not alone. Your son's room is within the sound of your voice."

"My son! Do you suppose, then, I would call that poor child to help me? To see him massacred?"

With his sententious authority the academician interposed:

"Rest assured, Madame Gilbert, that a son can be massacred no more easily than a husband."

At first this judicious remark silenced for a moment the mistress of the house, but then she answered with a little grimace. And this little grimace expressed a preference so decided for one of the two species of love which divide a woman's heart, this little grimace was so defiant of polite hypocrisies and unfriendly comment that everyone laughed uproariously, as all in a group they said good-night, protesting that they had stayed much later than they meant to, although it was then only half-past ten.

Only one person, the ex-prefect, lingered a little in the hall, with intentional awkwardness getting entangled in his overcoat.

From the back of the parlour, Madame Gilbert, sure that all were gone, scolded. "Come, André, get to bed at once. You are entirely too tired. Didn't you notice how badly you were looking to-night?"

(Every evening she asked him the same question with the same solicitude. "Not at all, mamma," her big boy would say, shrugging his shoulders. And this perfunctory reply was all that was necessary to reassure, until the next evening, this mother, like many another in her daily and unnecessary alarm.)

"André went to find a cigar for me," murmured a voice, whose familiar, though half-forgotten, vibrations made her quiver from head to foot.

And the speaker, returning towards her, with hurried step, said humbly, but passionately:

"Ah! If you would let me explain, defend myself. Yes, I was very wrong to let anything come between us! But I have repented, I do repent, and I love you more than ever! Jeannette! Jeannette!" he cried, in a suppressed voice.

She clasped her hands, and her face was marked by so many conflicting emotions, that one would have found it hard to tell whether this superb woman crushed between her white hands her anger or her grief.

"Do you dare?" she faltered at last. "I never can—silence. Here is my son!"

When, under her supervision, the maid had put in something like order Madame Gilbert's little parlour, and she had herself, according to her invariable custom, examined the locks of the doors leading to the great stairway and that of the servants, she shut herself into her own room. Once there, an unusual languor depressed her nerves. Instead of being in bed in less than a quarter of an hour, as was her usual habit, she forgot herself for double that time, dreaming in the depths of an armchair.

Across the corridor she heard André undressing, going back and forth; after a little, silence fell all around her. Her fingers, which were mechanically taking down her hair, became clumsy and were entangled in its meshes. Her mind was very busy.

"What did this return signify? What was the explanation he spoke of? What had come between them? It was all a mystery. But why had he said anything, unless he wanted to marry her now that her mourning was over?"

She rose, and going to her dressing-room, stared long and earnestly into the full-length mirror. A little later when she put out the lamp, lit the tiny nightlight, and went to bed, it was twenty-five minutes to twelve.

"Oh!" she thought, "was I sufficiently reserved?"

Instead of the sleep she hoped for she could get only a dizzying succession of broken naps and confusing dreams.

"No, no, in the future she owed herself without reserve to the adoration of her son. All the flame of her ardent soul should burn henceforth for that sole object. Ah, maternal affection was the only affection that was not deceptive and disappointing."

For some minutes she slumbered. But the rattle of a carriage woke her suddenly; a confused terror mingled with her vague remembrance of the recent conversation. Without knowing why, she listened to the last faint echo of the rolling wheels. And after it had died away the keen tension of her ears perceived in the neighbouring corridor a faint creaking.

"How silly I am!" she thought. "Even if it should be anyone, couldn't I reach the window at one bound? Then to smash out a pane and scream for help would be easy. What burglar would not fly before this unexpected energy and the certain response to the noise I would make? A man is only a man, after all."

And with this wise reflection, hearing no further noise, she buried her head in her pillow, determined to go to sleep at last. Nevertheless the thought of *him* took hold of her again. What audacity of him to come to her reception! After his base desertion which had forced her into a distasteful marriage! She remembered with remorse how little she had given to her husband, and her remorse turned to anger as she remembered how he, on his part, had neglected her. Again the widow's eyelids opened nervously.

Suddenly the blood in her veins seemed to congeal with supernatural horror.

There—just at the foot of the bed—the curtain was moving. And on its silken folds appeared a large hand, a scarlet hand. Madame Gilbert, terrified, incapable of articulating a sound, hoped at first that she was mistaken. Still she dared not move, not even an eyelash, as she lay still; sunk deeply into her soft pillow and far back in the curtained darkness of her bed. The absolute stillness was weird and alarming.

But presently the clock began to strike midnight. Every stroke seemed to Jeannette to prick into her like needles. By almost imperceptible degrees the *portière* was gradually raised.

As the clock was on the stroke a monster appeared!

It was a scarlet face, frightfully cut in two by a green moustache, beneath a nose of the most fiery red, which looked like a beak. Between two red horns was a mass of shaggy green hair. This frightful head peered into her recess, leaning upon the scarlet hand a chin from which hung a long green beard. The gaze of the apparition, fixed beneath its green eyelashes, sought the terrified gaze of Jeannette, shrinking in her dark corner. She felt herself carried far beyond the limits of what she had supposed a bearable terror. For she recognised them well, those eyes which sought her own

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with such sombre fierceness. They were surely, surely the eyes of her dead husband come to life again. Yes, she recognised them, without the relief of the slightest hesitation. And she recognised, too, that fierce moustache, and long beard, so diabolically coloured by those horrible vapours!

But what did he want, this returning spirit, who had never returned before? Why did he come this very night? And just after *him!* What fatal precision!

After a few torturing moments the fantastic being showed his full figure. He was tall and thin, clothed in black, with a white cravat, and held stiffly his bony arms, terminating, the left, in a green hand, and the right in a scarlet one. His long, narrow feet were covered with varnished boots ending in an incredible point. He advanced upon the carpet one step, then another. Then he glided forward in spectral fashion for several steps, and paused, wavering lightly on his toes.

The lips of the widow were incapable of forming a prayer. Her flesh crept at the sight of this phantom. Still gliding nearer to the alcove, the tall figure of the demon at last stood between the curtains. The shadowy light of the nightlamp illuminated the weird colour of this face, transformed and yet too familiar, alas!

By a last gleam of determination Jeanette lay still, with her eyes closed. No sound in the room, no sound in the street, no sound in the world!

The burning breath of a mouth close to her face seemed to scorch her. Pierced to the marrow by the intolerable breath, she felt her eyelids tremble and her skin shrivel. A nervous twitching in every joint seemed to seize her, and made it almost impossible to lie still beneath her covering. As soon as the flaming breath on her face seemed extinguished, an intense desire to see took possession of her. With the most minute care she slightly opened her eyes.

Oh! horror, the apparition was still there. But now its back was turned, its shoulders showing angular through its coat, like the fleshless bones of a skeleton. The green and the scarlet hand, working together with satanic skill, had opened wide without a sound the great glass doors of the wardrobe, whose hinges usually creaked so noisily.

Jeannette Gilbert had recovered her calmness sufficiently to seek the protection of God. She was about to make the sign of the cross, when the green and red devil as if he had divined this Christian impulse, turned suddenly towards her. His excited eyes flashed towards her a gleam whose power, more and more recognisable, she had often experienced.

She could see that his green hand was fumbling among a heap of rich laces, one of the few remnants of her wedding trousseau, and that the scarlet hand was plunged into a jewel casket, where the widow had herself recently put away her wedding ring. In her corner she could hear only a slight rustling as he moved the things. The silence and the supernatural mystery of all his movements stupefied her.

The strange visitor appeared about to close the door of the wardrobe when his hand fell upon an atomizer. With solemn gravity he sprinkled the perfume liberally upon his hair, his beard, and his scarlet cheeks. That finished, with one turn he vanished behind the *portière*.

The heavy drapery shook after his sudden disappearance, and long after the widow watched with a fascinated apprehension the folds wavering. When at last the thick hangings were still again, by a mighty effort Jeannette sat up in bed. She pinched herself, even pulled out an eyelash, to make sure she was awake. She spoke aloud to herself, but doubted the sound of her own voice.

While she was lost in doubt, the outside world, whose existence had seemed to her interrupted, renewed its tranquil course. A heavy waggon rumbled along the street. Half-past twelve sounded. Outside some wayfarer passed, piercing the air with his cheerful whistling. This manifestation of accustomed realities soothed Jeannette's heart. Her lungs dilated as she drew a full breath of relief.

Hastily she threw on a dressing-wrapper, and impatient to assure herself that the Thing—whether phantom or nightmare—was quite gone, she passed on tiptoe out of her room.

The parlour was still in comparative disorder after the modest reception. The dining-room was deserted. In the kitchen, the hall, nothing was visible. Courage was returning to Madame Gilbert, but not calm. As she passed along the hall on which opened the two sleeping-rooms, a strong desire seized her to see her son, to look with mute admiration upon that dear head in its innocent sleep, which no phantom had the right to haunt. With tender timidity she opened the door softly and with careful precaution.

The room was empty. The faint light showed her that André's bedclothes had not been disturbed. With a despairing cry the wretched mother sprang forward. On the mantel she saw a taper, lately blown out, for a tiny spark still smoked on the wick. Across a chair the clothes André had worn that evening were thrown carelessly; on the table by the bed lay a comb and brush; a pair of boots stood in the corner.

The distracted mother rushed back and forth, seeking, fumbling here and there, and lamenting audibly. On the top of the half-open drawer of the bureau lay two new silk gloves. One was green, and one was scarlet. Below them white cravats, silk handkerchiefs, other gloves, a box of envelopes.

Boldly the poor mother flings out what yesterday she arranged so carefully. At the bottom of the drawer she finds a square card, engraved. She reads it eagerly.

"Madame la Comtesse Antonietta de Clem begs the pleasure of M. André Gilbert's company on the evening of the Mardi Gras. A cotillon will be danced. Guests are requested to appear in costume."

A sudden light dawned upon Madame Gilbert's bewilderment. She understood all! Hastening back to her room she went over the contents of her wardrobe. Yes, that was it. From the pocket-book hidden below the laces a hundred-franc bill had been taken. In the casket, where the widow's rings were with her gold-pieces, two louis, perhaps three, were missing. "My poor son!" groaned the mother. "My poor son!"

How easily now could she explain the most mysterious details. In her bitter reflections she could see her son's eyes, so changed by fear and deceit that their usual gentle expression was replaced, by some mysterious heredity, with the hard, threatening look of his father.

Before daylight Madame Gilbert, through her tears and prayers, heard the furtive steps of the prodigal son returning to his room. Cold shivers ran over her frame. But they were shivers of pity and of triumphant love. She was lost in tender pity for André, for herself—and for another!

And, prostrate before her ivory crucifix, she listened to the counsels of a mysterious voice murmuring in her heart that human happiness is constantly built up with the broken fragments of past joys!

PAUL HERVIEU.

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"THADDEUS," said Bessie to her husband as they sat at breakfast one morning, "did you hear anything strange in the house last night? Something like a footstep?"

"No," said Thaddeus. "I slept like a top last night. I didn't hear anything. Did you?"

"I thought so," said Bessie. "About two o'clock I awoke with a start, and while it may have been a sort of waking dream, I was almost certain I heard a rustling sound out in the hall, and, immediately after, a creaking on the stair, as though there was somebody there."

"Well, why on earth didn't you wake me up, Bess?" returned Thaddeus. "I could very easily have decided the matter by getting up and investigating."

"That was why I didn't wake you, Teddy. I'd a great deal rather lose the silver or anything else in the house a burglar might want than have you hit on the head with a club," said Bessie. "You men are too brave."

"Thank you," said Thaddeus, with a smile, as he thought of a certain discussion he had had not long before at the club, in which he and several other brave men had reached the unanimous conclusion that the best thing to do at dead of night, with burglars in the house, was to crawl down under the bedclothes and snore as loudly as possible. "Nevertheless, my dear, you should have told me."

"I will next time," said Bessie.

"Was anything in the house disturbed?" Thaddeus asked.

"No," said Bessie. "Not a thing, as far as I can find out. The maid says that everything was all right when she came down; the cook apparently found things straight, because she hasn't said anything."

So Thaddeus and Bessie made up their minds that the latter had been dreaming, and that nothing was wrong. Two or three days later, however, they changed their minds on the subject. There was something decidedly wrong, but what it was, they could not discover. They both were awakened by the rustling sound in the hallway, outside their room, and this time there was a creak on the stair that was unmistakable.

"Don't move, Thaddeus," said Bessie in a terrified whisper, as Thaddeus made a brave effort to get up and personally investigate. "I wouldn't have you hurt for all the world, and there isn't a thing downstairs that they can take that we can't afford to lose."

Thaddeus felt very much as Bessie did, and it would have pleased him much better to lie quietly where he was

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than run the risk of an encounter with thieves. He had been brave enough in the company of men to advocate cowardice in an emergency like this, but now that this same course was advocated by his wife he saw it in a different light. Prudence was possible; cowardice was not. He must get up, and get up he did; but before going out of his room he secured his revolver, which had lain untouched and unloaded in a drawer for two years, and then advanced cautiously to the head of the stairs and listened—Bessie meanwhile having buried her face in her pillow, as a possible means of assuaging her fears. It is singular what a soothing effect a soft feather pillow sometimes has upon the agitated nerves if the nose of the agitated person is thrust far enough into its yielding surface.

"Who is there?" cried Thaddeus, standing at the head of the stairs, his knees all of a shake, but whether from fear or from cold, as an admirer of Thaddeus, I prefer not to state.

Apparently the stage whisper in which this challenge to a possible burglar was uttered rendered it unavailing, for there was no reply; but that there was some one below who could reply Thaddeus was now convinced, for there were sounds in the library—sounds, however, suggestive of undue attention to domestic duties rather than of that which fate has mapped out for house-breakers. The library floor was apparently being swept.

"That's the biggest idiot of a burglar I've ever heard of," said Thaddeus, returning to his room.

"Wha—wha—what, d—dud—dear?" mumbled Bessie, burying her ear in the pillow for comfort now that she was compelled to take her nose away, so that she might talk intelligibly.

"I say that burglar must be an idiot," repeated Thaddeus. "What do you suppose he is doing now?"

"Wha—wha—what, d—dear?" asked Bessie, apparently unable to think of any other formula than this in speaking, since this was the second time she had used it.

"He is sweeping the library."

"Then you must *not* go down!" cried Bessie, sitting up, and losing her fear for a moment in her anxiety for her husband's safety. "A burglar you might manage, but a maniac——"

"I must go, Bess," said Thaddeus firmly.

"Then I'm going with you," said Bessie with equal firmness.

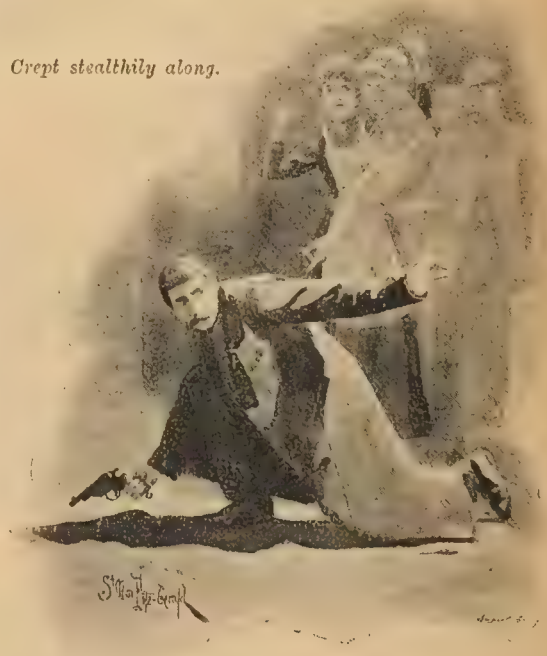
"Now, Bess, don't be foolish," returned Thaddeus, his face assuming a graver expression than Bessie had ever seen there. "This is my work, and it is none of yours. I positively forbid you to stir out of this room. I shall be very careful, and you need have no concern for me. I shall go down the back stairs and round by the porch, and peep in through the library window first. The moonlight will be sufficient to enable me to see all that is necessary."

"Very well," acquiesced Bessie. "Only *do* be careful."

Thaddeus donned his long bath robe, put on his slippers, and started to descend. The stairs were so dark that he could with difficulty proceed—and perhaps it was just as well for Thaddeus that they were. If there had been light enough for him to see two great, glaring eyes, that stared at him through that darkness out from the passage-way at the foot of the stairs upon which he turned his back when he went out into the porch, it is not unlikely that a very serious climax to his strange experience would have been reached then and there. As it was he saw nothing, but kept straight ahead, stepped noiselessly out upon the verandah, crept stealthily along in the soft light of the moon, until he reached the library window. There he stopped and listened. All was still within—so still that the beating of his heart seemed like the hammering of a sledge upon an anvil by contrast. Then, raising himself cautiously upon his toes, he peered through the window into the room, the greater part of which was made visible by the wealth of the moon's light streaming into it.

"Humph!" said Thaddeus, after he had directed his searching gaze into every corner. "There isn't anybody there at all. Most incomprehensible thing I ever heard of."

Rising, he walked back to the verandah door, and went thence boldly into the library and lit the gas. His



Crept stealthily along.

verandah observations were then verified, for the room was devoid of life, save for Thaddeus's own presence; but upon the floor, before the hearth, was a broom, and there were evidences also that the sweeping sounds he had heard had been caused by no less an instrument than this, for in the corner of the fireplace was a small heap of dust, cigar ashes, and scraps of paper, which Thaddeus remembered had been upon the floor in greater or less quantity when he had turned out the gas to retire for the night.

"This is a serious matter," he said to himself. "Something is wrong, and I doubt if there have been burglars in the house—but I can ascertain that without trouble. If the doors and windows are all secure, the trouble is internal."

Every accessible door and window on the basement and first floors was examined, and with the exception of the verandah door, which Thaddeus remembered to have unlocked himself a few minutes before, every

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lock was fastened. The disturbances had come from within.

"And Bess must never know it," said he. "It would worry her to death," and then there came a thought to Thaddeus's mind that almost stopped the beating of his heart.

"Unless she has discovered it in my absence," he gasped. In an instant he was mounting the stairs to hasten to Bessie's side, as though some terrible thing were pursuing him.

"Well, what is it, Ted?" queried Bessie, as he entered the room.

Thank Heaven, she was safe!

"Nothing much," said Thaddeus, in a moment. "There is no one below."

"But what could it have been?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," said Thaddeus. "unless it was a stray cat in the house. The sweeping sound may have been caused by a cat scratching its collar—or purring—or—or something. At any rate, things appear to be all right, my dear, so let's go to sleep."

Thaddeus's assumed confidence in the rightness of everything, rather than his explanations, was convincing to Bessie, and she in a very short while was sleeping the sleep of the just and serene; but to Thaddeus's eyes there was no more sleep that night, and when morning came he rose unrefreshed. There were two problems confronting him. The first was to solve the mystery of the swept library floor; the second was to do this without arousing his wife's suspicions that anything was wrong. To do this first he deemed it necessary to remain at home that day, which was easy, but how to do so without explaining why, was the point that bothered him. He solved it to his satisfaction very shortly, however. He summoned a messenger, and sent by him a note to one of his neighbours, requesting him to send a fictitious telegram telling him that his presence in town that day would not be required. This, he judged, would come to him at the breakfast table, and could be turned off as a pleasant surprise both for himself and Bessie.

It worked as Thaddeus had intended.

"Isn't it nice that it happened this morning?" she said. "You will be able to make up for your loss of sleep last night."

"Yes," said Thaddeus. "It's great."

Breakfast passed off pleasantly, in spite of a great drawback: the steak was burned almost to a crisp, and the fried potatoes were like chips of wood.

"Margaret seems to be unfamiliar with the art of cooking this morning," said Thaddeus.

"So it would seem," said Bessie. "This steak is horrible."

"The worst part of it," said Thaddeus, "she has erred on the wrong side. If the steak were underdone it wouldn't be so bad. Isn't it a pity some one can't invent a machine to rarefy an overdone steak?"

The morning was spent by Thaddeus in the "noble pastime of snooping," as he called it. The house was searched by him in a casual sort of way from top to bottom for a clue to the mystery, but without avail. Several times he went below to the cellar, ostensibly to inspect his coal supply—really to observe the demeanour of Margaret, the cook. Barring an unusual pallor upon her cheek, she appeared to be as she always had been; but with the housemaid it was different. Mary was evidently excited over something, but over what Thaddeus could not, of course, determine at that time. Later in the day, however, the cause of her perturbation came out, and Thaddeus's effort to keep Bessie from anxiety over the occurrence of the night before was rendered unavailing. It was at luncheon. The table was set in a most peculiar fashion. The only china upon it was from an old set which had been discarded a year previous to the time of the story, and Bessie naturally wanted to know why, and the housemaid broke down.

"It's—it's all we have, ma'am," she said, her eyes filling with tears.

"All we have?" echoed Bessie, in surprise. "Why, what do you mean? Where is the other set?"

"I don't know," protested the housemaid.

"You don't know?" said Thaddeus, taking the matter in hand. "Why don't you know? Isn't the china a part of your care?"

"Yes, sir," replied the maid; "but it's gone, sir, and I don't know where."

"When did you miss it?" asked Thaddeus.

"Not until I came to set the table for lunch."

"Was it in its proper place at breakfast time?"

"I didn't notice, sir. The breakfast dishes were all there, but I don't remember seeing the other plates. I didn't think to look."

"Then it wasn't a cat," said Bessie, sinking back into her chair; "we have been robbed."

"Well, it's the first time on record that thieves have ever robbed a man of his china," said Thaddeus calmly. "Have you looked for the plates?" he added, addressing the housemaid.

"No, sir," she replied simply. "Where could I look?"

"That's so—where?" said Bessie. "There isn't much use looking for dishes when they disappear like that. They aren't like brooms or buttonhooks, to be mislaid easily. We have been robbed, that's all there is about that."

"Oh, well," said Thaddeus, "let's eat lunch, and see about it afterwards."

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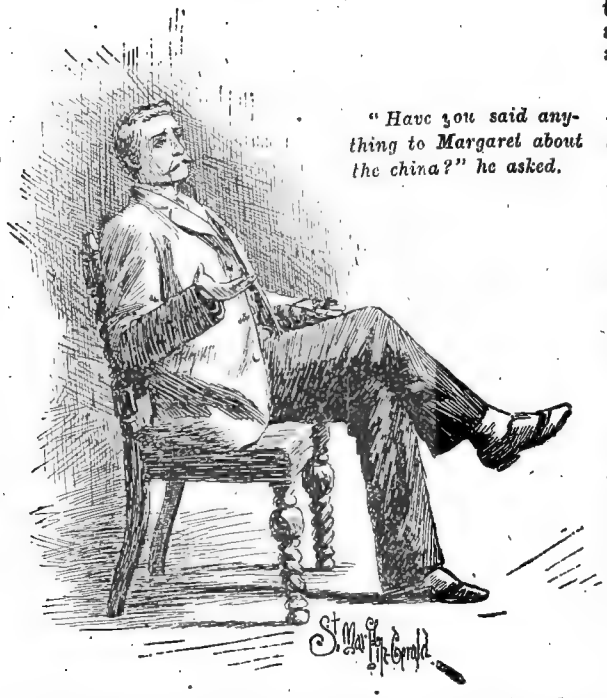

"Have you said anything to Margaret about the china?" he asked.

This was quite easy to say, but to eat under the circumstances was too much for either of the young householders. The luncheon left the table untouched; and when it was over, Thaddeus, calling his man into the house, wrote a note to the police station asking for an officer in plain clothes at once, and dispatched it by him with the injunction to let very little grass grow under his feet on the way down to headquarters. He then summoned the housemaid into the library.

"Have you said anything to Margaret about the china?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," she replied.

"What did you say?"

"I told her as how wasn't it funny the way it had went, sir."

"And what did she say?"

"Nothing, sir. Only she seemed to think it was funny, because she laughed."

"And what did you say then?"

"Nothing, sir. Margaret and me have very little conversation, because she don't fancy me, and prefers talkin' to herself like."

"H'm!" said Thaddeus. "Talks to herself, does she?"

"All the time, sir," returned the housemaid, "and she seems very fond of it, sir. She laughs and says things and then laughs again. She does it by the hour."

"How long has this been going on?"

"About a week, sir. I noticed it first last time I had my day out. I didn't get in until eleven o'clock, and I found her sitting at the table havin' a supper and talkin' and laughin' like as though there was folks around."

"She was entirely alone, was she?" asked Thaddeus.

"Yes, sir."

"What did you do when you came in?"

"I said good-evening to her and sat down opposite to her at the table, where there was a place set, and I told her I was glad she had something to eat and had a place set for me, because I hadn't had any supper and I was hungry, sir."

"Did she make any reply?"

"No, sir. She looked at me kind of indignant and turned out the gas and went up to bed, leavin' me in the dark."

Thaddeus's brow grew thoughtful again. It wrinkled into a half-dozen lines as he asked:

"Why didn't you speak of this before?"

"It ain't for me to be tellin' tales, sir," she said. "All cooks as I've lived with is queer like, and I didn't think any more about it."

"All right," said Thaddeus. "You may go. Only, Mary, don't speak of the plates again to Margaret. Say as little to her as you can, in fact, about anything. If you notice anything queer report to me at once."

The housemaid left the room, and Thaddeus turned to his desk. It was plain from his appearance that light was beginning to be let in on places that up to this point had been more or less dark to him, although, as a matter of fact, he could not in any way account for the mystery of the vanished plates any more than he could for the sweeping of the library in the still hours of the night. He had an idea as to who the culprit was, and what that idea was is plain enough to us, but the question of motive was the great puzzle to him now.

"If she did take them, why should she?" was the problem he was trying to solve; and then, as if his trials were not already great enough for one day, Bessie broke excitedly into the room.

"Thaddeus," she cried, "there's something wrong in this house. My best table-cloth is missing, our dessert spoons are gone, and what do you suppose has happened?"

"I don't know; a volcano has developed in the cellar, I suppose," said Thaddeus.

"No," said Bessie. "It isn't as bad as that—but the milkman has called to know whether we want the cream for dinner or for eleven o'clock, according to the order as he understands it."

"Well," said Thaddeus, "I don't see anything very unusual in a man's needing to be told three or four times what is expected of him."

"But I never ordered any cream at all," said Bessie.

"Ah!" said Thaddeus. "That's different. Did you tell Partinelli so?"

"I did, and he said he was sure he wasn't mistaken, because he had taken the order himself."

"From you?"

"No, from Margaret."

"Then it's all right," said Thaddeus. "It's a clue that fits very nicely into my theory of our recent household disturbances. If you will wait I think things will begin to develop very shortly, and then we shall be able to dismiss this indictment against the cat we thought we heard last night."

"Do you think Margaret is dishonest?"

"I don't know," said Thaddeus. "I shouldn't be surprised if she had friends with taking ways. In other words, my dear, I suspect that Margaret is in league with people outside this house, who profit by her mistaken notions as to how to be generous, but I can't prove it yet."

"But what are you going to do?"

"Set a watch. I have sent for a detective," said Thaddeus.

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This was too much for Bessie. She was simply overcome, and she sat squarely down upon the arm-chair, which fortunately was immediately behind her. I think that if it had not been she would have plumped down upon the floor.

"Detective!" she gasped.

"Exactly," said Thaddeus; "and here he comes," he added, as a carriage was driven up to the door, and one of the plain clothes police descended therefrom.

"You would better leave us to talk over this matter together," said Thaddeus, as he hastened to the door. "We shall be able to manage it entirely, and the details might make you nervous."

"I couldn't be more nervous than I am," said Bessie, "but I'll leave you just the same."

Whereupon she went to her room, and Thaddeus for an hour was closeted with the detective, to whom he detailed the whole story.

"It's one of the two," said the latter, when Thaddeus had finished, "and I agree with you it is more likely to be the cook than the housemaid. If it was the housemaid, she couldn't have stood your examination as well as you say she did. Perhaps I'd better see her, though, and talk to her myself."

"No, I shouldn't," said Thaddeus; "we'll pass you off as a business acquaintance of mine up from town, and you can stay all night and watch developments."

So it was arranged. The detective was introduced into the family as a correspondent of Thaddeus's firm, and he settled down to watch the household. Afternoon and evening went by, but without developments, and at eleven o'clock every light in the house was extinguished, and the whole family, from the head of the house to the cook, had apparently retired.

At half-past eleven, however, there were decided signs of life within the walls of Thaddeus's home. The clue was working satisfactorily, and the complete revelation of the mystery was close at hand.

"She disappeared just like that."

The remainder of the narrative can best be told in the words of the detective.

"When Mr. Perkins sent for me," he said, "and told me all that had happened, I made up my mind that he had a servant in his house for whom the police had been on the look-out for some time. I thought she was a certain Ellen Malony, *alias* Bridget O'Shaughnessy, *alias* many other names, who was nothing more nor less than the agent of a clever band of thieves who had lifted thousands of pounds of swag in the line of household silver, valuable books, diamonds, and other things from private houses, where she has been employed in various capacities. I couldn't understand why she should have made way with the dishes and Mrs. Perkins's table-cloth, but there's no accounting for the tastes of people in that line of business, so I didn't bother much trying to reason that matter out.

"After we'd had dinner and spent the evening in Mr. Perkins's library, the family went to bed, and I pretended to do the same. Instead of really going to bed I waited my chance and slipped down the stairs into the dining-room and got under the table. At eleven o'clock the maidservants went up to their rooms, and at a quarter-past there wasn't a light burning in the house. I sat there in the dining-room waiting, and just as the clock struck half-past eleven I heard a noise out on the stairs, and in less than half a minute a sulphur match was struck almost over my head under the table, and there stood the cook, her face livid as that of a dead person, and in her hand she held a candle, which she lit with the match. From where I was I could see everything she did, which was not much. She simply gathered up all the table fixings she could, and started downstairs into the kitchen with them. Then I went up to Mr. Perkins's room and called him. He put on his clothes and got out his revolver in less than two minutes, when we stole downstairs together, leaving Mrs. Perkins with her boy's nurse and the maid.

"In a second we were in the laundry, which was as dark as the ace of spades, except when the light from four gas jets in the kitchen streamed through the half-open door. Mr. Perkins was for pouncing in on the cook at once, but I was after the rest of the gang as much as I was the cook, and I persuaded him to wait; and, by thunder, we were paid for waiting. It was the queerest case I ever had.

"That woman—looking for all the world like a creature from some other part of the universe than this earth, her eyes burning like two huge coals, her cheeks as yellow and clear as so much wax, and her lips blue-white, with a great flaming red tongue sort of laid between them—worked like a slave cleaning the floor, polishing the grate, and scrubbing the table. Then she dusted all the chairs, and producing the missing table-cloth, she laid it, snow-white, upon the table. In two minutes more, the lost china was brought to light out of the flour-barrel, polished up, and set upon the table, enough for twenty people. The dining-room things I had seen her take, she arranged as tastefully as anyone could want, and then the finest lay-out in the way of salads, cakes, fruits, and other good things I ever saw was brought in from the cellar. To do all this took a marvellously short time. It was five minutes to midnight when she got through, and then she devoted three minutes to looking after herself. She whisked out a small hand-glass, and touched up her hair a bit. Then she washed her hands, and pinned some roses in her dress, smiled a smile I can never forget in my life, and opened the kitchen door and went out.

"'She's going to give a supper!' whispered Mr. Perkins.

"'It looks like it,' said I. 'And a mighty fine one at that.'

"In a minute she came back with a pail in which were four bottles of champagne, in her hand. This she took into the cellar, returning to the kitchen as the clock struck twelve.

"Then the queerest part began," said the detective

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"for ten minutes by the clock people were apparently arriving, though, as far as Mr. Perkins or I could see, there wasn't a soul in the kitchen besides Margaret. She was talking away like one possessed. Every once in a while she'd stop in the middle of a sentence and rush to the door and shake hands with some, to us, invisible arrival. Then she'd walk in with them, chatting and laughing. Several times she went through the motion of taking people's hats, and finally, if we could judge from her actions, she had them all seated at the table. She passed salads all round, helping each guest herself. She sent them fruit and cakes; and then she brought out the wine, which she distributed in the same fashion. She also apologised because some cream she had ordered hadn't come.

"When the invisible guests appeared to have had all they could eat she began the chatty part again, and never seemed to be disturbed but once, when she requested someone not to sing so loudly for fear of disturbing the family.

"Altogether it was the weirdest and rummest thing I'd ever seen in my life. We watched it for one full hour, and then we left because she did. At one o'clock she apparently bade her guests good-night, after which she gathered up and put away all the eatables there were left—and, of course, everything but what she'd eaten herself still remained—cleaned all the dishes, restored them to their proper places in the dining-room pantry, and went back upstairs to her room.

"Mr. Perkins and I didn't know what to make of it. There wasn't a thing stolen, and it was quite clear to my mind that I'd done the woman an injustice in connecting her with thieves. She was honest, except in so far that she had ordered all those salads and creams and things from time to time on Mr. Perkins' account, which was easy enough for her to do, since Mrs. Perkins let her do the ordering. There was only one explanation of the matter. She was a victim of hallucinations, and I said so.

"'I fancy you are right,' said Mr. Perkins. 'We'll have to send her to an asylum!'

"'That's the thing,' said I, 'and we'd better do it the first thing in the morning. I wouldn't tackle her to-night, because she's probably excited, and like as not would make a great deal of trouble.'

"And that," said the detective, "was where Mr. Perkins and I made our mistake. Next morning she wasn't to be found, and to this day I haven't heard a word of her. She disappeared just like that," he said, snapping his fingers. "Of course, I don't mean to say that anything supernatural occurred. She simply must have slipped down and out while we were asleep. The front door was wide open in the morning, and a woman answering to her description was seen to leave the Park station, five miles from the Perkins' house, in the 6.30 train that morning."

"And you have no idea where she is now?" I asked of the detective when he had finished.

"No," he answered, "not the slightest. For all I know she may be cooking for you at this very minute."

With which comforting remark he left me.

For my part I hope the detective was wrong. If I thought there was a possibility of Margaret's ever being queen of my culinary department, I should either give up housekeeping at once and join some simple community where every man is his own *chef*, or dine for ever more on tinned meats.

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Illustrated by A. Kemp Tebby.

The Editorial Mind.

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THE THREE LOVERS.

In one of the private parlours of the best hotel in the small town of X—— three young men were sitting in deep meditation around a table, sulkily smoking their cigars, and taking at intervals a sip of beer from the large glasses which they had in front of them.

Neither uttered a word. The prolonged silence commenced to become uncomfortable and oppressive, when Robert, the chemist, jumped up, and, striking the table energetically with his fist, exclaimed: "For heaven's sake, say something! We have been now sitting here a full hour, and do nothing but mope! It is enough to drive a man mad!"

"You are right. It is enough to drive a man mad!" remarked William, the cashier of the only bank the town could boast of, and with a melancholy smile he passed his hand through his glossy black hair.

"The old man is crazy!" now roared the third one of the company. "Totally crazy! I really believe his passion for gymnastics is so strong that he would force his daughters to marry circus clowns or acrobats instead of giving them to ordinary but highly respectable business men! But before I permit that my darling Ida be led to the altar by such a madman, then we both would rather"——the rest was lost in a few unintelligible words, seemingly containing some fearful threat.

"Not so loud, dear John!" the more thoughtful William tried to calm him. "Not so loud. There are people in the adjoining rooms who might overhear us, and if Mr. Grothe should find out that we speak of him in such a disrespectful manner, he would for ever exclude us from his family circle. Rather let us put our wits together and see if we cannot discover some means by which we may make the old gentleman change his views!"

"Make him change his views?" sneered the thoroughly provoked John. "That simply shows that you do not know old man Grothe! He is the most stubborn man I ever saw, and whatever he puts into his thick head he will carry through, and no arguments will make him alter his ideas! Just ask your Fanny. I know it from Ida."

"Yes, my darling Rose often complained to me about his obstinacy," chimed in Robert, with a sigh. "One can feel sorry for the poor girls."

"And still more for ourselves," grumbled John, running excitedly up and down the room.

"Sit down!" begged William, taking the resisting John by the arm and forcing him down on a chair, "so, and now let us once more talk the matter over quietly and come to some conclusion."

The friends moved closer together and, for the hundredth time, began to form plans for getting out of the perplexing situation in which they found themselves. All three were young men between the ages of twenty-five and thirty, and up to the time of our narrative had little cause to find fault with their fate. Healthy, fairly good-looking, holding good social positions, and having ample fortunes, they seemed to have a natural right to their desire—to marry the girls of their choice; and the three beautiful daughters of the wealthy, retired baker, and now omnipotent Mayor Grothe, were by no means opposed to becoming the wives of Robert, William, and John.

They were deeply in love with each other, and yet there was an insurmountable obstacle which prevented the attainment of their wishes. The old gentleman, whom our three friends were so anxious to have for their father-in-law, had one great passion, and to gratify the same he seemed willing to sacrifice the happiness of his children. Grothe, from his boyhood on, was an enthusiastic athlete, and when young ran away several times to join a wandering circus.

His father had great trouble to suppress this passion of the youngster, but finally succeeded, and made him adopt the baker's trade, a calling which he and his ancestors had followed. After his father's death, young Grothe continued the already flourishing bakery business, and carried it on so successfully that now he had retired with a large fortune, and shortly before the time of which our story speaks, his fellow citizens gave him a high proof of their confidence in his abilities by electing him Mayor of the town.

Throughout his long career, however, and notwithstanding his business and increasing family demanded most of his time, Grothe remained true to the passion of his youth. Whenever a travelling circus appeared in town he witnessed every performance, and his judgment on the quality of the same, and especially the gymnastic turns, was never questioned, and considered that of an expert. He received the *Bee*, a newspaper published in the capital, regularly every day, and always made the amusement notices his particular study, with the view of discovering new specialities. He was the first one to learn of any improvement introduced by an athletic club, no matter in what part of the globe, and it was this, his passion or fad, which gave to his native town one of the best athletic clubs in the country.

Grothe was founder, president, and general manager of this club; his whole being was wrapped up in it, and he paraded the twenty-five members in public as often as there was an opportunity for doing so. He presented the club with an enormous silk banner, and whenever the Grothe Athletic Club accepted a challenge from some other association to compete for a prize, it marched out with the banner carried at its head, and almost invariably was led to victory by it.

Grothe was proud of his club, which gained a far-reaching reputation for its excellence, and as the members of it belonged to the best families, it was only natural that the whole social life was guided by it, and, of course, the president and his handsome daughters were the centre of this small world.

The fresh beauty of the girls had brought many suitors for their hands to the house of papa Grothe, but they had never shown any preference for anybody. However, this state of affairs had changed since the last summer night's festival of the club.

On that occasion, there were three young men who paid considerable attention to the girls, and it was soon apparent that they had found favour in the eyes of the latter. All three were friends, and having been brought up in the capital, were perfect strangers to the good people of X—— until a short time ago, when they settled in the place, but through their open ways had already gained everybody's goodwill. Robert had established a new chemist's shop, William had accepted the

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position of bank cashier, and John was sent there by the railway company as stationmaster.

Unfortunately, all three were very poor athletes, and though they joined the club, they principally did so to please their prospective father-in-law. They rarely participated in the gymnastic exercises taking place in the club hall every evening, and the feats which they performed on the horizontal bars, etc., were such that President Grothe disgustingly remarked they were the worst attempts ever made in his club. He assured them that he would never allow his daughters to marry men whose physical developments made them unfit for good husbands and fathers, and he made a vow that he would only accept such sons-in-law who could prove their superiority in all-round athletic sports, and offer a fair guarantee to surround him with a lot of healthy grandchildren.

In vain did his daughters try to overcome his opposition; in vain did the three lovers try to convince him that he was making a fool of himself and his children unhappy; Grothe remained firm. They conspired, they used stratagem, all without success, and every new conference which they had on the subject gave no other result than to strengthen their opinion that the old man was crazy.

This was also the outcome of to-day's session, and after three hours of animated discussion, they had again found no way out of their difficulties.

Finally the chemist rose. "I am obliged to leave you now; it is late, and I am going to take the early morning train for the capital; there are some drugs which I have to purchase, so I have decided to go there myself. I will be back in a day or two. Good-night!"

"If you would find there a remedy for our cases, it would be preferable, and do us more good than your poisonous drugs!" called John, the stationmaster, after him, and then, accompanied by William, he left the room.

Late the next afternoon the chemist was standing in one of the prominent streets of the capital, looking with curiosity at some bill-posters, which announced in glowing terms and colours the different entertainments taking place in the theatre, etc. Suddenly he received a tap on the shoulder. He turned round, and was agreeably surprised to find himself face to face with his cousin, the editor of the leading newspaper of the capital.

In a few words Robert told him for what purpose he had come to the capital, and that, having finished his business, he was going to spend the evening at some theatre, mainly to get rid of a bad attack of the blues. The journalist looked at him searchingly, took out his watch, and, finding that it was only six o'clock, said: "This suits me admirably. Your train does not leave before midnight, and, as I have nothing better to do, I trust you will permit me to remain in your company. We will, first of all, have a good dinner; there is nothing better to drive away the blues; then you shall tell me what is troubling you, and we will afterwards go to the Concordia Theatre, where we will enjoy a splendid variety performance. Do not shake your head so gloomily. I have made up my mind to restore your good humour, and I'll do it."

The two cousins soon entered a prominent restaurant, ordered a choice meal and a bottle of wine, and then settled down to a pleasant chat.

It was long before the dinner was finished that Robert had made a clean breast of his and his friends' troubles, and the editor, who listened attentively to his tale of woe, showed his sympathy by calling old man Grothe by the hardest names he could think of.

With contracted brows he silently sat for a few minutes, as if absorbed in deep thought, touching neither food nor drink, when all at once his face cleared up, and, giving his cousin a hearty slap on the shoulder, he joyfully exclaimed: "Why, dear boy, I have a great idea. I'll get you all out of your difficulties in spite of Papa Grothe. In eight weeks, at the latest, you will be engaged to the girls you love, and the tyrant himself will have to join your hands, and, what is more, will glory in having you for his sons-in-law. I am willing to put up a year's salary as a guarantee that what I say will come true. But now let us go. It is high time. Later on I will tell you all."

Fifteen minutes later both were seated in one of the boxes of the Concordia Theatre and enjoying the performance of a number of variety artists. The programme was a lengthy one, and just before the last number was reached, the journalist whispered to his cousin: "Now, Robert, look out; here comes the promised remedy for your case!"

The curtain rose. The stage showed a few trapezes hanging down from the flies, and two horizontal bars. The orchestra began to play some lively air, and, rushing up to the footlights, came three clowns, who bowed to the audience smilingly, though on account of their grotesquely painted faces it looked more like a grin, and, tumbling over each other, they swung themselves upon the trapeze and bars as agile as little monkeys.

In quick order they now executed such marvellous gymnastic feats that the whole audience sat spellbound, and hardly dared to breathe. It was just that their names appeared in extra large type on the programme, and they fully deserved the title which accompanied the same: "Bob, Billy and Johnny, the Three Kings of the Trapeze."

When their turn was finished, the applause which followed was deafening. Again and again they had to come out and acknowledge their thanks, and it took some time before they were allowed to retire and the audience showed itself willing to leave the theatre.

Our two cousins found an exit which led direct to a side street, thus avoiding the rush of outpouring people, and here the journalist addressed his companion as follows: "Pay close attention, now. I will explain my idea so that you three lovesick fellows may gain the consent of the old man Grothe to marry his daughters. By-the-bye, I suppose you and your friends will not mind spending a few hundred marks for that purpose? No? All right! Besides, Bob, Bill, and Johnny are friends of mine. I have brought them out, puffed them up in my paper to their hearts' content, and never charged them a pfennig for doing so. They are, therefore, under obligations to me, and will do just what I want. We are going to meet them in ten minutes in the *café* adjoining the theatre, when I will introduce you to them and give you the necessary instructions. It will be a capital joke on your future father-in-law and you will benefit by its outcome."

* * * * *

During the following few weeks the society of the good old town of X—— was in a flutter of excitement. The ladies held mysterious conferences with their dressmakers, wardrobes were emptied of their contents, old dresses were ripped apart, and, after being trimmed with all kinds of glittering ornaments, tinsels, etc., made up into gorgeous-looking costumes. The most intimate friends, who never kept a secret from each

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other, now observed deep silence about their doings and all that, because within a short time the event of the year was going to take place—the great masquerade ball, which the Grothe Athletic Club gave annually at its hall.

Rumour had it that this ball would outshine all its predecessors, and that there was especially one feature among the many surprises which the members of the club had prepared that promised to create a sensation, for it had leaked out that the three youngest members would give a performance on the horizontal bars and trapeze such as had never been witnessed before. It was known that the three young men had practised for weeks behind closed doors, and that the president had granted the use of the club hall for that purpose, but as they otherwise kept the utmost secrecy about the affair, everybody looked with real impatience to the coming event.

It was also given out that the great editor of the influential daily paper would come from the capital to be present at the festival, and that he would afterwards write one of his brilliant reports about the same, which, printed in his paper, would be read by half the people throughout the country. President Grothe, in consequence, was in the best of humour. He had a pleasant word for everybody, and told his daughters not to spare any money for their ball toilets, as he wanted them to appear worthy of his dignified and exalted position.

Finally the so ardently longed-for evening arrived. The large club hall was crowded with masqueraders, and though the disguises were in many instances so slight that friends easily recognised each other, everybody had the good sense to keep up the deception, not to spoil his neighbour's pleasure.

Among the many peasants, gypsies, monks, nuns, flower-girls, soldiers, etc., etc., there were three grotesque clowns, whose droll capers were noticed by everybody. They called themselves Bob, Bill, and Johnny, and were billed on the programme for a special performance, which was to take place on a stage erected on one side of the hall. Of course, everybody knew that behind those masks were the suitors of Grothe's daughters, and, in fact, the chemist, bank-cashier, and stationmaster did not deny their identity.

The merry clowns were observed to be in constant attendance on three masks, dressed alike, representing water-nymphs, and it was not difficult to recognise hidden under reed-grass and water lilies, the beautiful daughters of the president. About half-an-hour before midnight a tall gentleman of distinguished bearing, attired in a black domino and wearing a black silk mask appeared among the dancers. He approached the clowns, whispered a few words to them, and then all four left the hall to reach the stage from the rear entrance.

There everybody had previously been prepared for the performance of the clowns, and trapeze as well as horizontal bars were in their right positions. The black domino, after satisfying himself that they were unobserved, opened a small side door and admitted three more men, who after throwing off their long ulsters, showed that they were wearing the same clown costumes as our three friends. They were the genuine Bob, Bill, and Johnny, from the Concordia Theatre.

For one moment the six clowns looked at each other in silence and then broke out in a hearty laugh, until the black domino hurried the three false acrobats out through the side door and locked it. He now gave the sign for the performance to begin. The orchestra stationed in front of the stage played a lively polka, the curtain rose, and Bob, Bill, and Johnny rushed out on the stage, bowed to the audience and, leaping up to the trapeze and horizontal bars, commenced their astonishing gymnastics.

Everybody was completely taken by surprise, and most of all, President Grothe. What he now saw was beyond his comprehension, and that three young men, whom he always considered worthless fellows, could perform such feats, was almost too much for him.

But it was reality. There were the three clowns, who only a few minutes before had danced with his daughters, executing with ease, before his very eyes, the most difficult turns, such as the best member of his club would have been unable to imitate; and as the gymnasts now left the stage, ending their performance with a double somersault, he gave the signal for applause, which made the walls rattle. Bob, Bill, and Johnny, in the meantime, hurriedly left the stage through the side door, and made room for their counterparts, who now appeared behind the footlights, bowing with the same grin on their faces, an acknowledgment for the generous applause. At this moment the clock struck twelve.

President Grothe rose ceremoniously from his chair, and commanded in a loud voice "Masks off." The three clowns followed everybody's example and took off their gaudily painted gauze masks, and, behold! there was no further doubt possible, the bold performers had been the chemist, bank cashier, and stationmaster.

Shortly afterwards the artistes appeared in the hall, and with them the strange gentleman in the black domino. He was the great journalist from the capital, and our friends immediately introduced him to the President, who received him with great respect, and at the supper, which now followed, assigned him to the place of honour at his right. Opposite them sat the clowns with the three water-nymphs.

After the roast had been served, President Grothe rose to deliver a speech on his favourite subject, "Athletic training," and in the course of his remarks he called the attention of the assemblage to the performance which they had just witnessed, and asked them to fill their glasses and drink to the health of the three great gymnasts, whom he now proudly introduced as his future sons-in-law. Three cheers were given with a will, and everybody hastened to congratulate the happy couples.

Then the editor addressed the company. In well-chosen words he cited many cases from ancient and modern history to prove what a powerful factor love always had been and still was. In the present case it had made out of simple business men acrobats who would be a credit to the best circus, but—and here he faced the president: "Our friends have a worthier calling. Once, under the *régime* of Prince Carnival, they have condescended to give their gymnastic productions, and we all have seen that these were of the highest order; but let this proof of their love and devotion suffice; they have now the good fortune to enter the inner circle of a highly respected family; let them henceforth devote all their time to make their wives and Papa Grothe happy!"

Everybody applauded. The president, with tears of joy in his eyes, embraced the speaker and assured him of his regret that he did not possess a fourth daughter; a man like him he would accept as son-in-law, though he had no athletic accomplishments whatsoever.

ERICH FLIESS.

Google

My Financial Career.

When I go into a bank I get nervous. The clerks make me nervous; the wickets make me nervous; the sight of the money makes me nervous. The moment I cross the threshold of a bank, I am a hesitating jay. If I attempt to transact business there, I become an irresponsible idiot. I knew this beforehand, but my salary has been raised to £22 a month, and I felt that the bank was the only place for it. So I shambled in and looked timidly round at the clerks. I had an idea that a person about to open an account must needs consult the manager. I went up to a wicket marked "Cashier." The cashier was a tall, cool fellow. The very sight of him unnerved me. My voice was sepulchral.

"Can I see the manager?" I said, and added solemnly, "alone." I don't know why I said "alone."

"Certainly," said the cashier, and fetched him. The manager was a grave, calm man. I held my £22 clutched in a crumpled ball in my pocket.

"Are you the manager?" I said. Heaven knows I didn't doubt it.

"Yes," he said.

"Can I see you?" I asked, "alone?" I didn't want to say "alone" again, but without it the thing seemed self-evident. The manager looked at me in some alarm. He felt that I had an awful secret to reveal.

"Come in here," he said, and led the way to a private room. He turned the key in the lock.

"We are safe from interruption here," he said; "sit down." We both sat down and looked at one another. I found no voice to speak.

"You are the detective, I presume," he said. He had gathered from my mysterious manner that I was a detective. I knew what he was thinking, and it made me worse.

"No," I said. "To tell the truth," I went on, as if I had been prompted to lie about it, "I'm not a detective at all. I've come to open an account. I intend to keep all my money in this bank." The manager looked relieved, but still serious; he concluded now that I was a son of Baron Rothschild, or a young Gould.

"A large account, I suppose," he said.

"Fairly large," I whispered. "I propose to deposit £22 now and £10 a month regularly." The manager got up and opened the door. He called to the cashier.

"Mr. Montgomery," he said unkindly, "this gentleman is opening an account; he will deposit £22. Good-morning." I rose. A big iron door stood open at the side of the room.

"Good-morning," I said, and stepped into the safe.

"Come out," said the manager coldly, and showed me the other way. I went up to the cashier's wicket and poked the ball of money at him with a quick, convulsive movement, as if I were doing a conjuring trick. My face was ghastly pale.

"Here," I said, "deposit it." The tone of the words seemed to mean, "let us do this painful thing while the fit is on us." He took the money and gave it to another clerk. He made me write the sum on a slip of paper and sign my name in a book. I no longer knew what I was doing. The bank swam before my eyes.

"Is it deposited?" I asked in a hollow, vibrating voice.

"It is," said the cashier.

"Then I want to draw a cheque."

My idea was to draw out £2 of it for present use. Some one gave me a cheque book through a wicket, and some one else began telling me how to write it out. The people in the bank had the impression that I was an invalid millionaire. I wrote something on the cheque and thrust it in at the clerk. He looked at it.

"What! are you drawing it all out again?" he asked in surprise. Then I realised that I had written £22 instead of £2. I was too far gone to reason now. I had a feeling that it was impossible to explain the thing. All the clerks had stopped writing to look at me. Reckless with misery, I made a plunge.

"Yes, the whole thing."

"You withdraw your money from the bank?"

"Every penny of it."

"Are you not going to deposit any more?" said the clerk, astonished.

"Never." An idiotic hope struck me that they might think something had insulted me while I was writing the cheque and that I had changed my mind. I made a wretched attempt to look like a man with a fearfully quick temper. The clerk prepared to pay the money.

"How will you have it?"

"What?"

"How will you have it?"

"Oh." I caught his meaning and answered, without even trying to think, "In twenties." He gave me a twenty-pound note.

"And the two?" he asked drily.

"In twos," I said. He gave it to me and I rushed out. As the big doors swung behind me I caught the echo of a roar of laughter that went up to the ceiling of the bank. Since then I bank no more. I keep my money in cash in my trousers pocket and my savings in gold in a sock.

E. A. Nash.

RESULT OF

Jumbled Story Competition.

No. 11.

More than one competitor succeeded in correctly putting together this story, and the prizes have therefore gone to those whose attempts first reached this office. £5 has been sent to Mr. Wm. Millard, The Schools, Ascot, Berks; and £1 each to Miss B. Mellin, 35, Onslow Road, Fairfield, Liverpool; Mr. Wm. Boyle, Harbour Office, Swansea; Miss M. Mellin, 8, Swiss Road, Fairfield, Liverpool; Mr. P. A. Kay, Sandhurst, Swiss Road, Fairfield, Liverpool; Mr. L. Cundell, 144, High Street, Southampton

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THE EMPTY BOAT.

It was in December, about two o'clock in the morning. Baron Louis Monnier was returning from his club to his apartments in Grenelle Street, finishing his cigar. The clearness of the winter's night inspired him to walk. He turned up his large fur collar, put his hands in his pockets and started across the Pont Royal.

The Seine was not yet frozen, and the Baron, reaching the middle of the bridge, stopped to admire the fairy-like picture the city presented, with the deep shadows of Notre Dame and the Palace of Justice brought out by the blue light of the moon, while upon the dark water of the river the reflection of the lights quivered and lengthened.

"My! It's cold," said he, buttoning the last button of his coat.

He had just started again, when his attention was drawn to a dark object which was turning around and around in the middle of the Seine. As the object grew more distinct, the Baron recognised a boat adrift. No one was in it, as the two oars were lying uselessly across it. In the solitude of the night this empty boat slowly moving by itself was appalling.

Louis Monnier foresaw immediately some tragic scene, accident, or crime of which the shores and the stars had been the only witnesses. He no longer felt the cold, but remained standing on the parapet, viewing the boat, its clumsy seats, its tarred boards, and its heavy oars, used so lately by an unknown hand.

The waif was very near the bridge, when the Baron was drawn from his reverie by the approach of an individual who ran up, and stopping near him leant upon the parapet and contemplated the boat with an air of frenzy.

Louis Monnier noticed the figure of this man, his black beard, his white face, his ulster of large plaid (which was prominent under the gaslight). He saw him bend over a moment when the boat reached the arch, then crossed the bridge in order to see it again as it came out. A minute later, the unknown walked away rapidly, taking the left bank.

The Baron, slightly puzzled, followed him with his eyes, and saw that he ran along the quay, in the direction of the Pont de la Concorde. Finally the man took the pavement in front of the houses; stopped a second to shake hands with a wine merchant, who was closing the front of his shop, then began to run. He reached the Pont de la Concorde and leant again over the parapet to watch the boat pass under.

Monsieur hesitated a moment whether to follow him, then thinking it was the affair of some lunatic or drunken man, he turned into the Rue du Bac, and lighting another cigar, in order to dissipate the dismal impression which the little boat had made, went home.

The Baron soon lost all thought of this adventure. Eight days after he was quietly drinking his absinthe at a little table on the Boulevard about six o'clock.

The temperature was mild, the Boulevard gay and animated. After taking a sip, the Baron began to read a paper. He looked over the various items, when suddenly, while reading a long article, he began to tremble, and returning to the first line he read each word carefully.

The article concluded with the words:

"A crime was committed on Monday last, at a place up the river called Joinville-le-Pont, under mysterious circumstances. A woman named Louise Sauvêtre, who ran the ferry, and lived alone in an isolated house on the border of the Marne, had suddenly disappeared. The day before yesterday morning her body was found, caught by some willows, a hundred yards below that place. A wound in the neck made by a knife proved that the unfortunate was the victim of an assassin. Suspicion rested upon a countryman of twenty years, who lived on the opposite shore. This individual emphatically denied all knowledge of the crime, but circumstantial evidence pointed towards him, as a knife, probably like the one used, was found in his house. He was arrested. The boat used as a ferry has disappeared.

"It is supposed that the affair took place in the following fashion: About eight or nine o'clock in the evening the young man hailed the woman Sauvêtre, and crossed the river with her. After cutting her throat and throwing her into the water, he returned to the right bank and pushed away the boat, whose presence on that side would awaken suspicion.

"The little old house of the victim was entirely stripped. It is true, only insignificant sums were found at the presumed assassin's house, but it is supposed he cautiously buried somewhere the two or three thousand francs which the ferrywoman had saved. This young man, Thomasseau by name, had served two sentences for poaching. He tried to evade the law now by affirming that on the night of the crime he saw an individual approach the river and call the ferrywoman. But as no other neighbour knew of this incident, it was deemed improbable. We will keep our readers informed concerning this dramatic affair."

After reading the article two or three times, Baron Monnier placed the paper on a chair, and crossing his hands upon his stick, he began to reflect profoundly.

That drifting boat which the article mentioned, was it

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the one he had seen whirling down the Seine to the Pont Royal? The date coincided—it was, indeed, Monday of the week preceding. Supposing the crime had been committed about eight o'clock, it would certainly take five or six hours for the boat, slowly borne by the current, to reach the centre of Paris. It was probably on that night that it had drifted seven or eight leagues without being perceived or stopped by anyone. Perhaps, it was only a coincidence after all; with the enormous number of boats on the Seine, two could easily become loose at the same time.

Monsieur Monnier tried to distract his thoughts, but he could think of nothing else. The strange individual, who had watched the boat pass under the bridge; the anxious desire of this man to follow the wreck puzzled the Baron the more he reflected upon it. Hypothesis followed hypothesis, until he became convinced that this stranger possessed alone, perhaps, the secret of the drama which was enacted on the Marne eight days ago.

What ought he to do? His conscience told him to go to the Prefecture of Police, who were still engaged in the inquiry; but indolence, *ennui*, the necessity of testifying in the courts kept him back. He thought to himself that his deposition was very unimportant, that perhaps it would be laughed at, and after all the law was able to unravel it alone.

However, if the inquest should be wrong, if the man arrested should be innocent? The charges brought against him were indeed serious!

At all events Baron Monnier put the matter by until the next day in order to see what turn the affair took; then, as it was time to dine, he arose, and following the Boulevard des Capucines, went to his club.

The next day, after a sleepless night, during which he recognised the duty imposed upon him, the Baron entered the Prefecture of Police about three o'clock. At the sight of his card, which bore one of the most conspicuous names in all Paris, he was received in the private office of the chief, without waiting.

He excused himself first for bringing evidence which doubtless would have no interest; then in a few words, he related what he had seen on that Monday night, the empty boat, and the individual who persisted in following it the length of the quay.

When he finished he renewed his excuses smilingly, but the chief interrupted him: "Your deposition," said he, "on the contrary, is of extreme importance; the description of your individual corresponds exactly to that of the man whom Thomasseau has described. Would you repeat it?"

"Certainly. Medium height, slight, very black beard, in double points; an ulster——"

"With large plaids? That is well. As to the hat, Thomasseau said a soft felt—but returning to Paris, the assassin, if he is the assassin, would change all that. Now, could you put us on the track of this man?"

"I saw him stop a second to shake hands with a wine merchant."

"The address?"

"The first shop upon the quay on the left bank, going from the Pont Royal to the Pont de la Concorde."

"Very well. Evidently this man is a regular customer. Now, one minute, and I am at your service; will you please be seated, Monsieur le Baron?"

The chief approached the telephone, called the bureau of police near the Pont Royal, and gave a description of the individual, with the order to go to the wine merchant's for information.

"It is strange," said the chief, seating himself again at his large desk, opposite Monsieur Monnier, "that chance serves us better than logic to find a criminal! Sometimes all indications are gathered, all the acquaintances of the victim are sounded, and when everything is settled, some unexpected revelation abruptly illuminates the affair. It is most often a detail of apparent insignificance."

"Then you believe that the assassin——"

"Is the man whom you met Monday night. If I dared, I would say already that I am sure of it."

"But you have no proof, and only a slight similarity in the description which you already possess."

"Well, but the presence of this individual upon the bridge. His delirious obstinacy in following the boat, which, perhaps, he had expected there for some time. His action, or the place, or the object haunted him. Ah! Here is the response!"

The electric bell of the criminal rang. The chief received the message and returned to his place.

"The individual is captured," said he. "They found him at the tavern. He will be here in five minutes. Then we shall know!"

Soon the agents entered with the man. He was livid, his face was distorted. The chief made him sit down, and brusquely demanded:

"How long have you known the woman Sauvêtre?"

"I? But——"

He hesitated, fearing to compromise himself even by denying the acquaintance.

"Reply."

"I knew her very little. I saw her once last year, crossing the Marne."

"Well, that is enough. Now, what were you doing upon the Pont Royal on Monday of last week, at two o'clock in the morning?"

"At two o'clock, upon the Pont Royal?"

"Yes. This gentleman saw you."

The man lost his head, finding the interrogator so well informed, and at once fell into the trap which had been laid for him.

"And what were you doing about eight o'clock in the evening, the same day, in front of the house of this woman Sauvêtre?"

"I—I returned to Joinville to take the train."

"That is sufficient. We know the rest. For what motive did you assassinate this poor woman?"

"I assassinate her? I?"

"Do not try to deny it. We know all!"

After some more hesitation, the criminal ended by confessing, uttering a cry of despair. Later, he told the manner in which the crime came to him. He was left without money or resources, and knowing the woman Sauvêtre had saved up some money, he planned a most mysterious crime. After it, he returned to Paris, but the haunting of the crime began to beset him. After running from *café* to *café* the shock increased, as he found himself alone. Then the thought of the boat drifting alone came to him. He had waited for it to pass forty or fifty minutes, at the Pont Neuf, crazed by this expectation.

After his recitation he was seized by a nervous spasm, and it took the two agents' strength to prevent him from smashing his head against the wall. The chief thanked Monsieur Monnier warmly for bringing a telephone to justice.

"Oh," said the Baron, "I am happy to rescue from your hands the poor, innocent fellow Thomasseau."

Parry Shute.

Google

HIGH PLAY.

A Comedy off the Stage.

By G. Manville Fenn.

CHAPTER XXV.

Before the Dawn of Day.

Allan Murray was not the only one to whom temptation came that night, when four women suffered agony such as they had never known before.

Neither of them closed her eyes in restful sleep, but sat communing with self as the hours slowly crept along.

Olive, in spite of effort and persuasion on the part of her father, passed the night on the landing by the drawing-room door, taking mechanically such refreshment as Emsworth brought her from time to time, but never stirring from her jealously-guarded post. Lucy kept her long watch between tending her suffering aunt, who would not even take to the couch, declaring that if she did she should die before the surgeon could come again, and insisting upon sitting uneasily in the chair.

From time to time, though, the girl stole out to the foot of the stairs to wait till she saw Emsworth doze off in the seat he had taken upon the landing by the flowers, and then she crept up step by step in the dark till she could see the top of the drawing-room door, within which lay all she loved on earth. Then, not content, she crept higher, step by step, till she could see Olive seated with her head resting on her hands.

Strange thoughts passed through the girl's breast as, keeping in the darkness, she watched that bended form with a deadly hatred, growing more and more powerful, till it seemed to carry all before it like a flood.

Why had she not killed her before? Then this woman who had come between them would not have kept her from Braetoun's side. It would have been so easy—so very easy, but never one half so easy as it would be now. She could have forgiven her if she had kept away; but for her to come at a time like this, strong in her position, and force her to take a place like a servant in her own house, where all had been so happy only a few hours before! While now she had to creep and steal up just to watch the door, when she would have given the world to have crept to Braetoun's side, just to touch his hand—to wait till he grew well, for she felt that if she could do that it would be impossible for him to die.

And this woman who called herself his wife, and was always trying to steal away his love from her who had won it first, was the cause of all her misery—for the doctor's orders had no place in her mind just then.

The night wore on, and poor Aunt Duncan moaned and bewailed her fate, till again and again Lucy stole out to rest, and crept out to watch the panels of the door whenever Emsworth dropped asleep, and each time that deadly, desperate thought kept on growing till it was like a black cloud, and overshadowed the whole place.

"It would be so easy," she kept on thinking; and as the day approached the idea grew simpler still of execution. There was a tea-cup on a bracket close to Olive's hand, taken with loving care by Emsworth. Olive must have something of the kind to keep her there alive; she did not want to spoil her beauty now, and make Braetoun hate her. That would be useless. Roderick would be ill for weeks, perhaps, and this woman, his wife, would stay, and she, the woman who loved him with all the strength of her untutored nature, would be forced to keep away and suffer. Olive would suffer, too, in her way, and people would say afterwards that she died broken-hearted of grief, and how

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easy it would be for her to die broken-hearted of grief. A few drops of some subtle fluid poured in the cup that was always going up and down, and she would be there no more, and she who loved him so would be at peace, and always at his side.

Temptations were strong that night in the little bijou residence the house agent extolled and its mistress loved to deck with flowers, for the other sleepless woman, Mary Jennett, the favourite nurse whom Murray trusted, and had sent to many cases, had her strange thoughts, engendered by a wild idea that more than once the great doctor had looked upon her with pleasant eyes—with looks which might mean a great future to her. These thoughts she had fostered till Braetoun's last bad illness, when something she had seen had changed her feelings to those of hate.

For she had divined the truth, and henceforth Murray had occupied a different position in her eyes, while Olive would not be safe with her, she told herself, if some day she were called in as her nurse.

She was very sleepless, for a strange suspicion had taken possession of her soul, and she too watched through the long hours of that fateful night—watching the patient carefully—the doctor more.

For from time to time Murray did things she had never before seen in her experience; and to her distorted vision they could mean only one thing—fatality to one possibly on the brink of death, and who, left alone, might live.

And she said to herself ought she not to interfere and try to save him, when it was to her evidently all with the intent of getting the patient out of the way, for reasons she knew well. But why should she interfere when revenge was ready to her hand, and she would have the great doctor who had slighted her well under her thumb? Revenge, perhaps love; who knew what else beside? The patient was nothing to her—a poor weak creature, with a life not worth saving, so she moved in and out with the keen eyes of some nocturnal creature, noting every action as she busied herself softly in the room, and watching as keenly through the narrow opening of the folding doors, when, at a whisper from Murray she had to go there to wait.

And the night glided slowly on, the only one apparently at peace being Roderick Braetoun, as he lay back there in the shadow that seemed to grow blacker as the day approached.

"Would they call it murder if they knew all?" said Nurse Jennett to herself, as she stood close to the narrow crack, where one fold nearly touched the other, and saw that Murray was on one knee, bending over Braetoun; and she drew her breath through her teeth with a faint, sibilant sound.

Then all at once she drew back, still watching, for Murray rose slowly, and stood gazing down at the motionless figure on the mattress; and he was still standing there watching, when a faint light behind the blind threw off his figure as a tall, black silhouette.

For the day was beginning to dawn.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Aunt Duncan Clears a Block.

"Curious problem, the human being, sir," said the surgeon that same morning. "When I left you last night I never expected to see him alive again. Slept well, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Murray quietly, as the surgeon bent over and examined Braetoun, and then proceeded to dress and re-bandage the injury to his head.

"Well, it is wonderful—quite a lesson to one never to be in a hurry to give up. At the same time one must not be too sanguine, or I could readily say he may pull round after all."

"I think he will now," said Murray gravely. "Of course, his condition is still extremely critical."

"Of course, of course: but he is a different man this morning."

The surgeon finished his task, and then attended Aunt Duncan, who insisted upon being taken home.

"I should never get better here," she said irritably.

"Better wait a few days, madame," said the surgeon.

"No, not an hour," she said. "If I'm to get better I can't do it with that young man dying upstairs all night and all day long. I want to go home."

The result was that after the surgeon had gone, refusing to undertake the responsibility, Aunt Duncan sent the maid to summon Murray, who came down and found her in a high state of excitement, protesting to her niece that she was quite well enough to go, while Lucy vainly strove to calm her.

The sight of the irritable old woman and the pale-faced, red-eyed niece brought up a fresh train of thought to Murray's mind, and after a short examination of the Aunt's condition, he answered her appeal at once.

"Yes," he said; "I think you might be moved, and that you would feel more at rest and better at home."

"There, my dear," she cried triumphantly, "that other doctor don't know his business. I can feel I shall be much better at home. So you order a fly—I won't have a squeezy cab—and take me back home at once."

"No, Auntie," said Lucy coldly. "You know I can't leave: you must stay, and let me nurse you here."

"Now, don't you turn neglectful to your poor old Aunt when she's bad, and throw me over like that, my dear. You don't want to kill me, do you?"

"No, Aunt; you know I don't."

"But how am I to know if you talk like that? It will kill me if I stop here. All night through have I been in agonies of pain and listening to the steps overhead, sounding like the undertaker's men busy with a coffin, and I can't bear it, my dear. It's killing me; and if you don't want to see me a cold corpse at your feet take me away at once."

"Auntie!" cried Lucy with a shiver, "you must be patient. I can't leave home now; do, do pray be patient."

"I can't, Baby; I won't; it's impossible. How can I get better with that poor young man dying all over the place upstairs? It's harrowing up my feelings so that I've felt all night as if I should have a fit. I can't bear it, Baby Lucy. You worried me into coming, and it's brought me to this state, and you must take me home. I declare, ever since they brought me back here I've had Brompton Cemetery on the brain."

"No, no, no, Auntie," cried Lucy caressingly, as she hung over the old woman. "Do, do please be patient. I can make you so much more comfortable here, and I'll nurse you and do everything for you myself."

"I want to go home," said the old woman stubbornly. "If I've got to die I'll die in my own bed, and I've left my keys at home, and there's boxes and cupboards as nobody shan't touch but me."

"But, Auntie, dearest, do, do be reasonable."

"I am quite reasonable. I won't stop here with a death in the house. I've got lots to do before I die."

"But think, dear, of what trouble I'm in myself. I can't go away and leave him now."

"He left you, and he'll leave you again."

"Auntie!"

"If he lives, so I don't see why you should be so particular about going away from him. You take me home at once and nurse me there."

"Auntie! I can't—I can't."

"There! And after all I've done for you, Baby. Oh, the ingratitude of this world! Oh, dear! Oh, dear! But I might have known—I might have known. Oh!—oh!"

The first "Oh" was for mental pain, the second louder, and for bodily. She had tried to throw out her arms, with the result that a sharp pang shot through her shoulder from the bandaged limb, and Murray, who had been patiently waiting and listening, relieved to find the way in

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which matters were working for Olive's benefit, stepped to the chair.

"Pray sit still, madame," he said gently, as he carefully arranged a cushion under the broken arm, and then touched her dank forehead with some eau-de-Cologne from the table, for she had turned faint with agony, and Lucy flung herself upon her knees at her feet.

But Aunt Duncan did not quite lose her senses, and, as she recovered a little, she repulsed her niece, who sank in a heap on the floor, sobbing.

"Don't—don't, please, Doctor," she whimpered. "It's very good of you, but never mind me. You go up and see to that poor fellow upstairs. He's young. I'm only a worn-out old woman, and good for nothing but putting in the ground out of the way."

"Oh, Auntie, Auntie!"

"Ah, yes; been like a mother to you, I have, Baby, and loved you more. And now I'm getting old, and you've broke me, and I'm no more use; let me die out of the way. There, I don't bear no malice. I saved everything for you, take it and spend it, and I hope you'll be happy."

"Auntie, dear!"

"Yes, very dear, of course. Only don't let me be dear when I'm dead. Don't spend much. A common ellum coffin and black handles 'll do, and if that costs too much let the parish do it, and don't go to the expense of a stone."

"Oh, you cruel, cruel old Auntie, when I'm nearly heart-broken, and in such distress and pain that you can't understand a bit."

"No, no, no! I'm only a silly old thing, and no use. Never mind me. Doctor, I'll stay. Serve me right for being such an old fool. What did I want on a box seat? There, I'll stay."

"You will, Auntie?" cried Lucy eagerly; but she turned ghastly, and shuddered almost as she spoke.

"Yes, I'll stay and die here. Don't let the doctors bother and hurt me no more. I know the pain ain't so bad, and I know what it means. My arm's a-mortifying and going to drop off."

"No, no, no!" said Murray, smiling in spite of himself, and he softly pressed the old lady's head back upon a pillow.

"Thank you, my dear; you're very good and kind. Thank you, but don't do it no more; let me die out of the way. Lucy!"

"Yes, Aunt, dear."

"Put your hand right down into my pocket, not the outside one, the inside, and get out my puss."

"No, no, Auntie, it would hurt you to move you."

"And what of that? I want my puss."

"What for, Auntie? I've got some money."

"Then you keep it. I want the doctor to have his fee paid him at once, and I'll see it done."

"No, no, Auntie; be quiet. There is no need now."

"You get out my puss, miss, at once," cried the old woman angrily, "or I'll do it myself with my broken arm."

"Oblige me by lying back quite still," said Murray, taking her hand. "Miss Lee, it would be far better for your aunt to be carefully taken to her own home."

"God bless you, my dear," said the old woman, with a sob, and she squeezed the hand she held.

"But it is impossible," said Lucy wildly.

"No; it would be very easy. An ambulance could be brought, and she could be lifted in."

"And took to the 'orspittle!" cried Aunt Duncan excitedly. "Not me. I'd sooner stay here."

"No, no, no," said Murray with all a woman's tenderness. "You are feverish, and ready to let fancies get into your head. You shall be taken home, and lie for a few days in your own bed, with your niece to attend you. There you will be quiet and feel at rest, and soon be up and about again. I'll come and see you there."

"God bless you, my dear!" she said thankfully. "I was afraid you were going to pack me off to the 'orspittle."

"Because I mentioned an ambulance carriage? Oh, no; that was so that you should not suffer from being moved. I will send a telegram for one directly. It will be much better, Miss Lee, and give her what she requires—peace of mind."

"Well, I do believe in you, my dear. You seem to understand me down to the ground. Shall I get better if I go away?"

"I guarantee that you will," said Murray soothingly "Your niece will soon nurse you back to health."

"Hear that, Lucy?"

"Yes, Auntie, you shall be moved then; but I cannot leave here. I must stay."

"No, you mustn't. You must come with me, and don't stand staring at me in that gashly way. What are you thinking about?"

The girl, whose face was white and drawn, started violently and shuddered.

"And don't shiver like that. He says I shan't die."

"No, Aunt, you will not die. You must have a good nurse. I cannot leave here now."

"And I say you shall, miss. I won't have you ungrateful, so there. You are not wanted here. I know my lord's wife's come, and the sooner you go the better. It ain't proper for you to be here, and you've got to come home with me."

Lucy's little lips tightened together, her brows contracted, and she stood there without speaking.

"Oughtn't she to come, Doctor?" cried the old woman.

"Yes," said Murray firmly, "and I'm sure that Miss Lee will see that this is the only way out of this terribly painful position."

"I cannot go—I will not go," said the girl through her set teeth.

"You must go," said Murray sternly but kindly. "Please think I wish to spare your feelings, but Lord Braetoun cannot be moved for weeks."

"Then he will live?" cried Lucy, with a wild cry of excitement.

"I believe so—I hope so now. Lady Braetoun's place is at his side."

Lucy uttered a low, painful sobbing breath.

"And you must see that it will be horrible for you both. You must go."

"No, no, no," cried the girl piteously. "Don't, don't, Doctor. I must stay. It's my house, and I will."

"You cannot," he said firmly. "You cannot command yourself. You do not even know yourself what you might do."

She drew slowly back from him, with her lips apart and her eyes staring with horror and amaze, and he took advantage of the impression he saw that his words had made, and continued:

"There, you see. Now, be advised, for your aunt's sake, for your own. Take my advice, and go at once."

She turned slowly from him, shivering, and walked to the window, to stand gazing out for a few moments.

"And if——" she faltered at last without turning.

"I have told you the simple truth," continued Murray "Last night I could not have said this; to-day I can. I believe, with constant care and nursing, we can bring him round. You will not stand in the way of his being brought back to life?"

She faced round angrily.

"I'd die to save him," she cried.

Murray looked at her for a few moments, and her eyes met his unflinchingly.

"I believe you," he said at last, "and you believe in me?"

"Yes," she cried quickly.

"Help me, then, to save him," he said quietly.

"I want to stay and help you," she said with a low wail.

"Your stay would hinder and do harm—on my word, as a man. Will you insist in staying now?"

She shivered again and covered her face with her hands.

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Then, with a weary sigh, she turned slowly to her aunt, bent down and kissed her, ending by resting her forehead on the old woman's shoulder.

"Yes, Doctor," she said softly, "for his sake I'll go."

CHAPTER XXVII.

Dead Beat.

"Why don't you speak to me?" said Lady Braetoun appealingly, and she caught the nurse's arm as she was passing down the stairs. "Tell me how my husband is?"

The woman shrugged her shoulders slightly, as she replied respectfully, but with a hard look in her eyes:

"I didn't think your ladyship wished me to speak. The patient seems to be sleeping more easily now. I beg pardon, my lady; Doctor Murray has sent me to get a little more brandy."

"Yes, yes, quick! Go at once," cried Olive hastily, and, with a curious smile of contempt and dislike upon her lips, the woman went down; while Olive, feeling herself alone, sank upon her knees by the door to pray that the sufferer might live.

She did not hear the approach of steps ascending the stairs, and sprang up with a faint cry of horror when a hand was tenderly laid upon her head.

"Don't, don't, my darling. There, let me take you downstairs now."

"Downstairs?"

"Yes; they've gone."

"They've gone?"

"Yes; that girl and her aunt."

"Gone?"

"Yes; I don't know how Murray managed it. He was down there with them when you were so angry about his neglecting Braetoun, and somehow he managed to talk her round. I didn't say anything to you before, because I was afraid of there being some failure just at the last, but Murray set me to see to the arrangements, and she has gone off in an ambulance carriage with the aunt, and is not coming back while you are here."

"Oh!" ejaculated Olive, with a deep sigh of relief, and she closed her eyes and rested her forehead on her father's shoulder for a while.

"You and I don't half know Allan Murray, my dear," said the old man softly. "We can never thank him enough for what he has done for us."

"Never, father, never," she said softly.

"But I always thought I was right about him from the first time we met. I wish there were more like him in the world."

"Hush!" whispered Olive, and she laid her hand on her father's lips as a low moan came to them from within. "The nurse has gone down for brandy. He must be worse."

"Don't, don't get excited, dear. It may mean that he is better."

"But the anxiety seems more than I can bear, father. If I could but be there! This ignorance is terrible. Ah! quick, nurse, quick!"

"I am being as quick as I can, my lady," said the woman as she ascended the stairs and entered the room and closed the door after her, as if glad of the opportunity of excluding the wife from the husband's room.

"Not a very nice woman, my dear," said Emsworth slowly. "But there, she must be a very clever nurse, I suppose, or Murray would not have chosen her. Now, my darling, I want you to come down."

The door opened again, and Murray came out.

"Worse?" cried Olive wildly.

He looked at her with a peculiar quivering about his eyelids as he hastened to set her mind at ease.

"No; calmer and more restful," he replied, as he gave Emsworth a questioning look, to which the other replied with an emphatic nod.

"Now, Lady Braetoun," he continued, "the house has been set at liberty. I must ask you to go down from here now, and take a few hours' rest in one of the rooms below."

"No, no; impossible."

Murray shook his head with a sad smile.

"No," he said; "it is impossible for you to live without rest and sleep. You must take some repose."

"I cannot leave here," said Olive.

"Half hysterical already," said Murray. "Please, be advised. There is no need for you to sit here longer."

"No need?" she cried wildly.

"None; and if you do persist, you will be unfit to come and watch and nurse the patient when I give you leave to enter his room."

"Ah! You will do that soon?"

"Yes: I can venture to do that soon," he replied, with his face twitching slightly. "I expect Sir Grange in shortly, and we shall have another consultation. If he agrees, then you can take your place by Lord Braetoun's side."

"Ah!" ejaculated Olive excitedly. "You hear, father?"

"Yes, my dear; I hear," said Emsworth coldly.

"But only if you do first what I ask," said Murray.

"What is that?" said Olive excitedly.

"Go and lie down first for a while."

Olive held out her hand to the speaker, and he took it and held it between the trembling palms, gazing down into the eyes which looked in his with a look full of reverence and love.

"Yes," she said, "you are right, Doctor. God bless you for all you have done for us. I cannot say much now of my gratitude—I will show it by my obedience to all you say; for if ever father had true, earnest friend, if ever woman had faithful, helpful brother in their sore distress, my father and I are those two."

"Amen," said Emsworth, in a choking voice; and with her lips quivering now, she clasped her father's arm, and let him lead her down to the little parlour, where she sank helpless on the couch, and fell at once into a deep sleep that was, in its utter insensibility almost a swoon.

(*To be continued.*)

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION.

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The word was "self-immolation"—value, 126.

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No. 14.

Somewhere on pages 440 to 444 two words are transposed. The first is taken from its correct position on the page and put somewhere else, and the vacancy filled up by the displaced word. For example, in the following conditions the words "distance" and "guinea" are transposed. A guinea is offered to the first reader living within 100 miles of London, who first points these words out, and another *distance* for the reader whose attempt bears the post-mark of a place a greater *guinea* from this office. *Post-cards only, please.*

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25,000 USELESS MUSKETS.

On the battlefield of Gettysburg, during the Civil War in America, were found 25,000 muskets, each containing from one to ten cartridges. In the din and excitement of the battle the men supposed themselves to be firing at the enemy when they were not. The fault was probably partly with the soldiers and partly with the guns. At all events, there were, no doubt, 125,000 cartridges unused, enough under some circumstances to decide the issue of an engagement. Does this remarkable fact suggest any lesson to your mind? Are there not?—but let us get at the conclusion in an orderly way.

"Up to April of last year," writes a correspondent, "I never had a day's illness. At that time, however, I caught a severe cold, which took all the life and energy out of me. I felt tired, heavy, and weary. My appetite left me, and what food I ate gave me much pain and distress in the pit of the stomach, and in the chest. Only a short time elapsed before a nasty cough fixed upon me, which made my chest and sides sore, and on two occasions I spat up blood. As you may imagine, this gave me considerable anxiety, for it looked as though my lungs might be affected.

"Next my heart began to trouble me. It often throbbed and fluttered until I thought it would jump out of its place."

[Lest we forget it, we would better say at this place that the disordered heart action, of which our friend speaks, is apt to alarm not only the patient, but skilled physicians, and lead to a line of treatment which does no good and involves the loss of precious time. It is one of many symptoms that misleads the observer, and illustrates the deceptive character of the real disease.]

"When I was at work," continues the writer, "I was often taken with dizzy spells, sometimes in the street. Everything around me seemed in a whirl, and I had to resist the tendency to fall to the ground.

"My nights were simply awful. I got no proper sleep or rest at all on account of bad dreams and the twisting pains and trembling of the stomach. With all this you will understand I was never easy night or day. The prospect was very dark ahead of me, and I felt miserable and wretched, not knowing what would be the end of it.

"Month after month I remained in this condition. The doctor whom I consulted examined me, and advised me to be extremely careful of myself."

[Good advice. But how is a man in such a situation going to be more "careful" than he already is? Being careful presupposes knowledge of what to do, and what not to do, the exact points upon which the sufferer had not a ray of light or information. It is like telling a man who is lost in the woods to be careful to keep in the right path.]

"The doctor's medicine," concludes the letter, "gave me a little relief temporarily, but I was soon bad as ever. One day in July (1894) I read in a little pamphlet about cases similar to my own having been cured by Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup. As a sort of forlorn hope I got a bottle from Mr Simpson, chemist, Well Street, Hackney. It relieved me in two days. I was able to relish some simple food, and it agreed with me. Keeping on with the Syrup the heart trouble and other pains soon abated, and after taking three bottles I was completely cured, *and have never had an ache or a pain since. I can do any kind of work and am strong as ever.* (Signed) Marcus Rickwood, 13, Lauriston Road, South Hackney, London, January 9th, 1895."

You, the reader, will draw the inference. We are all soldiers in the great Army of Humanity, fighting side by side against the same enemies, for the same cause. But, alas! how many are disabled by disease. Look about you and count them. They are more than you can number. And the chief disease—the one that cripples most—is that from which Mr Rickwood suffered—indigestion and dyspepsia. Send for the book he mentions and study the subject. Then, when needful, use the remedy that enabled him once more to report for duty.

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